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Political Dissent in Democratic Athens

Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule

JOSIAH OBER



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Political Dissent in Democratic Athens

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Political Dissent
in Democratic Athens

INTELLECTUAL CRITICS OF
POPULAR RULE

JOSIAH OBER

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PRINCETON AND OXFORD

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Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 3 Market Place,
Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1SY
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Third printing, and first paperback printing, 2002
Paperback ISBN 0-691-08981-7

The Library of Congress has cataloged the cloth edition of this book as follows

Ober, Josiah.
Political dissent in democratic Athens : intellectual critics of popular rule / Josiah Ober.
p. cm. — (Martin classical lectures)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-691-00122-7
1. Athens (Greece)—Intellectual life—Political aspects. 2. Democracy—Greece—Athens—
Historiography. 3. Dissenters—Greece—Athens—Political activity. I. Title. II. Series:
Martin classical lectures (Unnumbered)
DF275.033 1999
937 s—dc21
[938'.506] 98-7110

British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

This book has been composed in Times Roman

Printed on acid-free paper. ∞

www.pup.princeton.edu

Printed in the United States of America

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4

• *FOR ADRIENNE* •

F A I R E S T C R I T I C

[W]hen we are dealing with words that are also a constituent
act . . . we must realize that they have called into life a
being the development of which could not have been foreseen
completely by the most gifted of its begetters.

—*Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes*

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THIS BOOK was written for two audiences: for political theorists interested in the problem of dissent in a democratic society, and for ancient historians, classical philosophers, and students of Greek literature. The main text is written with both audiences in mind; there, all Greek is translated and transliterated, and all terms unlikely to be familiar to a general reader are explained at first use. Some of the footnotes deal with terminological matters, niceties of translation, and scholarly controversies; these are aimed primarily at classicists. Theorists will find in the footnotes discussions of the ideas of contemporary political thinkers and references to the extensive secondary literatures on each of the main ancient texts. All secondary works are cited by short title; full citations for all works cited will be found in the Bibliography. Those concerned neither with technical matters of classical scholarship nor with its secondary literature, and willing to forego possible parallels between ancient and modern political theories, are cordially invited to ignore the footnotes; the main text should be fully explicable without reference to them.

Translations either are my own or are adapted from the editions cited in the footnotes to each chapter. Proper names most familiar in their Latinized forms are left as such (e.g., Socrates, Thucydides); otherwise I have transliterated directly from the Greek. Transliteration conventions are quite standard (although note *ch* [not *kh*] for *chi*, *u* [not *y*] for *upsilon*, *ē* for *eta*, *ō* for *omega*). My apologies to readers of classical Greek for the admitted inelegance of transliteration, and to those who do not read ancient languages for the frequency of transliterated Greek words and phrases in the main text and the occasional use of the Greek alphabet in the notes. This is not mere pedantry: keeping the original Greek terminology before the reader is important because my arguments often depend on demonstrating the reiteration and revaluation of particular words and phrases (as well as ideas) by successive Greek writers. Important Greek terms are listed in the Index. Citations of classical texts are by the standard classical conventions: by book (where relevant), chapter, and section (Ps.-Xenophon, Thucydides, Ps.-Aristotle, and most prose authors); oration and paragraph number (Attic orators); book and chapter (where relevant), and standard page number (Plato and Aristotle); or play and line number (Aristophanes and other dramatists). Fragmentary works are cited from the standard collections, which will be found in the Abbreviations or Bibliography.

I have been working on this book on and off since 1989 and have been lucky enough to contract many debts in the course of research, writing, and revision. Various chapters were written and revised in Bozeman (Montana), Washington (D.C.), Princeton (New Jersey), Armidale (New South Wales, Australia), and Cambridge (England); I have enjoyed friendship, hospitality, and intellectual companionship in each of these far-flung towns—I leave it to readers to decide

if regional inflections remain. Thanks for material support in the form of research fellowships are due to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the John S. Guggenheim Foundation. Montana State University and Princeton University provided other funds as well as leave from teaching and administrative duties. The Center for Hellenic Studies, the University of New England, and Clare Hall, Cambridge, offered residential fellowships that were true to the happiest sense of the word. I was invited to offer preliminary versions of the ideas presented here at lectures and seminars at universities in Australia (Australian National University, Macquarie, Melbourne, Monash, Sydney, University of New England), the United States (California-Berkeley, Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Florida State, Harvard, Iowa, Johns Hopkins, Princeton, Rice, Stanford), and England (Cambridge, Keele, Oxford, University College London). I had the honor of presenting drafts of Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6 at Oberlin College, as the Martin Classical Lectures for 1994. I am very grateful for the gracious hospitality I was shown on each of these occasions and for the many responses and suggestions I received; they often resulted in fundamental reassessments. Special thanks are due to Andrew Ford, Simon Goldhill, Melissa Lane, Geoffrey Lloyd, Michelle Maskiell, and Froma Zeitlin, who gave advice on individual chapters, and *a fortiori* to Paul Cartledge and Malcolm Schofield, who read a draft of the entire manuscript and offered detailed and extremely useful comments. The help offered by each of these scholars has kept me mindful of the boundaries of my own knowledge and appreciative of the unbounded pleasures of friendship. Christian Bloom and Sherry Wert saved me from many errors, editorial and substantive.

In the course of writing this book, I joined the faculty of Princeton University. I offer here my sincerest thanks to my colleagues and students in the Department of Classics, the University Center for Human Values (especially its two directors, Amy Gutmann and George Kateb), and the Committee on Political Philosophy. Without their erudition and intellectual generosity in matters literary, political, historical, philological, and philosophical, this book could not have been written. Meanwhile, Bozeman, Montana, has also remained a fundamentally important personal cornerstone; I reiterate thanks to the people of Montana who have offered me more than I have been able to return. A case in point: the late Mr. George Francis and his family have for many years offered neighborly conversation and unstinting access to a lovely stretch of the Gallatin River, whose clean water and wild trout have given me so much happiness. My deepest and most enduring debt, to my wife, Adrienne Mayor, is inadequately expressed in the dedication.

For any abbreviations not included in this list, see the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (*OCD*), 3d edition.

- Apol.* Plato *Apology*
- Budé Collection des Universités de France, publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé (Paris)
- DK Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1966–67)
- EE* Aristotle *Eudemian Ethics*
- EN* Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*
- GHI* Marcus N. Tod, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946–48)
- HCT* A.W. Gomme, (with Antony Andrewes and Kenneth J. Dover), *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1945–81)
- IG* *Inscriptiones graecae* (Berlin 1873–)
- Loeb Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press
- LSJ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones, 9th ed., with supplement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968)
- ML Russell Meiggs and David Lewis, eds., *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988)
- OCD* *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 3d ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996)
- OCT Oxford Classical Texts, Oxford: Clarendon
- RE* *Paulys Real Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, rev. begun by Georg Wissowa (Stuttgart, later Munich); J. B. Metzler, succeeded by Alfred Druckenmüller, 1894–1980
- Teubner B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, Leipzig
- West Martin L. West, *Iambi et elegi graeci*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991–92)

Political Dissent in Democratic Athens

INTRODUCTION

Why Dissent? Why Athens?

THE WESTERN TRADITION of political and ethical thought crystallized in the Greek city-state of Athens in the late fifth and fourth centuries B.C. But why just there and then? And why have ancient Greek discussions of politics—of power and justice, individual and community, deliberation and enactment, class conflict and public interest, eros and education—seemed so compelling to so many readers ever since? In seeking new answers to these questions, I have willfully ignored standard academic distinctions between the fields of history, philosophy, and literature. This book is intended as a contribution to intellectual history, but it depends on philosophical arguments and is informed by a literary sensibility. It is in the conviction that multidisciplinary endeavor represents the future (as well as the origins) of classical studies that I offer what follows—both as a substantive hypothesis about the relationship between democracy and dissent, and as a demonstration (an *epideixis*) of an original approach to the problem of understanding an ancient cultural past and its contemporary meaning.

As Bernard Williams recently observed, “The Greek past is specially the past of modernity.”¹ The special status that Greek literature has long enjoyed within the European tradition obviously cannot be explained entirely in terms of its innate qualities. But even after making every allowance for the sociology of knowledge, after taking into account the various historical factors that once conspired to establish literature written in ancient Greece as “classical,” we—as a culture and as individual readers—remain entranced by the texts themselves and by the ideas that they embody.² Is it possible to define what it is about classical Greek political writing that has attracted and continues to attract interpreters from so many disciplines—analytic philosophers, political and literary theorists, sociologists, intellectual historians, and practical politicians (as well as professional classicists)? Why should its devotees be drawn from such a wide historical range of interpretive strategies and attitudes: from enthusiastic Renaissance humanism, to scientific modernism, to ironic postmodernism, to the chastened historicism of the late twentieth century? Why should they manifest such a broad spectrum of political commitments, from staunch conserva-

¹ Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 3. Williams’ book is an eloquent defense of the direct relevance of Greek ethical thought and literature to modernity, yet abjures traditional platitudes about *why* the Greeks are important to us; moreover, while writing as a philosopher, Williams demonstrates that it is possible to be simultaneously attentive to history, philosophy, and literature.

² Of course, “we” is a pregnant term. I write in the conviction that “the classics” *do* retain a certain authority in Western culture and in the assumption that this book’s readers are likely to be interested either in classical literature itself, or in its ability to entrance others. Fascination does not equate with approval: one may be at once fascinated and morally outraged by cultural artifacts—and by one’s own and others’ reactions to them.

tives, to self-styled moderates, to the most ardent social revolutionaries? Why should non-elite students, who know little or nothing about ancient Greece, be so moved by their first exposure to Plato's *Apology of Socrates*?³

Some part of the answer must surely lie in the classical texts' felicitous marriage of arresting literary form and profound philosophical content; the articulation of that conjunction was, I will argue, an effect of Greek social and political history. In place of now-embarrassing essentialist fantasies about the "Greek miracle," I suggest that we think about the productive capacities of a complex culture that existed for a very long time in a state of dynamic social tension, tension that was a direct result of its "failure" to settle into a stable political hierarchy among native-born adult males. The lack of a single, stable hierarchy allowed for various outcomes: some Greek states were extremely volatile, whereas others, including democratic Athens, achieved a high degree of political stability.

The relative weakness of Greek political hierarchy is related to the strength of a distinctive "middling" ideology that effectively delegitimated many forms of aristocratic privilege. Most classical Greek city-states failed to develop an integrated matrix of religious and economic structures capable of sustaining the monopoly of public matters by a small political elite. No classical Greek city-state long tolerated a strong monarchical government; few can be characterized as stable aristocracies. Greek polis governments can, for the most part, be defined as republics of one sort or another; in many poleis, men well below the level of leisure-class nobles were genuinely important in political and military affairs. The absence of a steep political hierarchy was culturally remarkable; it was not typical of the contemporary neighboring civilizations of Egypt, Anatolia, and western Asia. Greek elites (those who were wealthy, highly educated, and relatively cosmopolitan in outlook) were well aware that their inability to monopolize public affairs was anomalous, and they sought by various means to "normalize" the situation. Their sub-elite fellow citizens typically resisted these attempts. And thus city-state politics were characterized by intermittent civil conflict and by incessant social negotiations between an elite few who sought to gain a monopoly over political affairs and a much larger class of sub-elite adult males who sought to retain the privileges of citizenship or to gain that coveted status. Those hard-fought political conflicts and complex social negotiations proved to be a very fertile ground for the development of philosophical speculation and literary culture.⁴

³ Non-elite students impressed by Socrates include the undergraduates I taught at Montana State University, 1980–89, and, in a recent and striking example, the impoverished students undertaking a humanities course at New York City's Roberto Clemente Center: Shorris, *New American Blues*.

⁴ The sociocultural origins of this "failure," which may be traced back into the eighth century B.C. or before, are discussed by Morris, "Strong Principle"; and Hanson, *Other Greeks*. Recent work on the democratic politics of Hellenistic cities (e.g., Gauthier, "Cités hellénistiques," 217–23; Habicht, *Athens*) suggests that its effects persisted long after the overthrow by the Macedonians of Athenian democracy in 322 B.C.

Taking into account the historically peculiar failure of Greek elites to monopolize politics helps to explain the flourishing of polis culture and the social relationships that undergirded it. Yet, even within the Greek context, classical Athens stands out. If some important aspects of Greek culture can be explained in terms of a fruitfully unresolved conflict between aristocratic values and demotic sensibilities, in classical Athens demotic sensibilities were successfully translated into democracy—a coherent political ideology and an effective institutional structure that went far beyond other forms of Greek republicanism by making full participatory citizens of even the poorest native males. The resulting challenge to Greek aristocratic values was stark and systematic. Moreover, Athenian democracy proved unexpectedly workable. Athens fielded powerful military forces and survived two nasty oligarchic coups d'état at the close of the fifth century; by the early fourth century, democracy appeared more firmly entrenched than ever. I attempted to explain Athenian sociopolitical resilience in two earlier books on Athenian leadership and public rhetoric, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (1989) and *The Athenian Revolution* (1996). *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens* carries forward my study of ancient Greek political discourse by looking at some notable elite literary responses to classical democracy's evident success.

The use in my title of the terms “critics” and “dissent,” with their strong overtones (at least for a readership attuned to twentieth-century American political writing) of the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School and the influential magazine of democratic-socialist opinion, *Dissent*, founded by Irving Howe shortly after the death of Stalin, is intentional.⁵ I hope that using these terms in reference to classical writers who were deeply suspicious of democracy, and who are typically described as conservative (if not reactionary), will be provocative in the most optimistic sense of that word. My thesis is that the Western tradition of formal political theorizing originated in the work of an informal, intellectual, and aristocratic community of Athenian readers and writers. That work was under way by the mid-fifth century B.C., but it became more challenging and intellectually ambitious after the collapse of the brief and brutal oligarchy of the Thirty in 403 B.C. In an atmosphere of profound disillusionment with practical attempts to establish a nondemocratic government at Athens, the elite Athenian critics of popular rule set themselves the arduous task of reinventing political dissent. This meant, in the democratic Athenian environment, finding new grounds for explaining what was wrong with “the power of the people” and describing alternative visions of consensual and noncoercive—yet nondemocratic—political societies. The result was a set of robust and highly original approaches to political philosophy.

Explaining what was wrong with democracy in the years after 404 B.C. was difficult for both negative and positive reasons. Negatively, by confronting

⁵ On the Frankfurt School, see Rocco, *Tragedy and Enlightenment*, 171–208. On *Dissent* magazine, see M. Cohen, “Introduction.”

Athenian aristocrats with a grotesque caricature of their cherished ideals, the regime of the Thirty had thoroughly discredited oligarchy. The oligarchic junta systematically murdered Athenian residents, exiled citizens en masse, and confiscated property at whim. By stark contrast, the restored Athenian democracy, acting with consummate attention to legality, established and ensured conditions of personal and collective dignity (freedom conjoined with political equality and security) for all citizens. Positively, this guarantee proved to be a deeply compelling premise for a social and political order.

Attempting to explain the remarkable attractiveness and wide dissemination of the term “democracy” in the modern world, John Dunn suggests,

It is as the acknowledgment that freedom, the condition of not being *under*, directly subject to the will of, other human beings is what political rule should attempt to supply to modern citizens or subjects that democracy (this far flung Greek word) has won its present preeminence . . . it is a fair guess that most human beings, most of the time, other things being precisely equal, would prefer to be free in this simple and evocative sense.⁶

Not only did classical Athens invent the term *dēmokratia*, but Athens represents the first protracted and successful experiment with the extension of freedom in the sense used by Dunn to a mass of ordinary men, without regard to their property holdings, within a relatively large (perhaps 200,000 persons) and complex society. In contrast to modern democracies, Athens achieved and maintained the “negative freedom” from subjection not by a doctrine of inalienable constitutional or legal rights, but by the “positive freedom” of citizens to participate directly in politics—to deploy power and to establish public meanings. And this meant that freedom was not a gift offered by an altruistic elite, nor was it guaranteed by a paternalistic governmental apparatus; it was the product of the day-to-day political activities of a mass of ordinary men. In Athens, negative freedom and positive freedom were inseparable and mutually entailing: a citizen remained free because he, along with his fellows, defended himself by political means against those forces that constantly threatened to subject him to the will of another.⁷

The culmination of Greek republicanism in Athenian democracy was an extraordinarily important historical event. It was the moment when the veil of mystification, by which ruling elites in complex societies successfully obscured (whether willfully or not) the conceivability of the enjoyment of freedom in Dunn’s sense by any but a tiny minority of the population, was ripped apart; the moment when the practical possibility of freedom for many (if not yet for all—although see Chapter 3) was first starkly revealed. Elite Athenian critics of popular rule were confronted with the problem of explaining, in the face of this momentous revelation, why the extension of freedom to the many was a mistake, and why values other than freedom should be given priority. Dunn’s re-

⁶ Dunn, “Transcultural Significance,” 105.

⁷ For a fuller discussion, see below, 1.B.2, and Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, esp. 86–106.

marks about democracy and freedom lead me to suggest that classical Athenian political thought and practice are so enduringly fascinating at least in part because they offer us shadow-twins of our own most cherished ideal. Athenian men seemingly possessed the condition of freedom that we want for ourselves, but they gained and kept it by means (communal deployment of political power) that we have convinced ourselves must be impracticable or incompatible with the desired end. Athenian critics of democracy, for their part, seek to demonstrate that the freedom we desire is not actually best for us after all.

The aristocratic Athenian critics of democracy, lacking resort to traditional forms of mystification, attempted to argue the case against democratic freedom on its merits; in the place of the tattered veil, they sought to demonstrate that nondemocratic values were choiceworthy on rational grounds. Athenian political texts have proved enduringly attractive to *opponents* of democratic freedom because they seem to provide the warp and woof of a rewoven veil of mystification, along with a set of moral justifications for suspending that veil before the eyes of the many. But one need not be an illiberal democracy-hater to be caught up in the philosophical excitement and literary grace of the Athenian literature of dissent. In the democratic present, we read Athenian political thought with such strong and mixed emotions because it explores, in pointed and insightful ways, the potential contradictions within and limitations on a condition to which we ourselves (most of us, most of the time) most ardently aspire. And we read it because it still tempts us with some of the most intellectually and aesthetically seductive alternatives ever devised to that most desirable condition of freedom.

If democracy's capacity to supply freedom qua "not being under another" to a broad franchise presented elite Athenian political critics with a profound intellectual problem, then freedom qua "absence of censorship of expression" was the precondition for their undertaking to solve it. Unlike political critics in most hierarchical and authoritarian societies, elite Athenians inhabited a culture remarkably tolerant of the free expression of political opinion. Moreover, they enjoyed abundant resources historically denied to many political dissidents—good educations, access to a prestigious literary tradition, adequate leisure, high social standing, and a value system that encouraged both emulation and competition with elite rivals.

Democracy, as a hard problem, presented over a period of several generations to a community of intellectuals with both a strong motivation to solve it and relatively great resources, led to the production of some extraordinarily provocative works of political philosophy. I offer readings of a limited selection of those texts. Though I do deal with whole texts rather than snippets, and I organize chapters around writers rather than concepts, I do not offer a full portrait of the political thought of any of the seven authors discussed in the following chapters. From the perspective of each author, my treatment is missing either a beginning (Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is noted only in passing) or an ending (not much on Thucydides books 7 and 8, or on Plato's *Politicus* and *Laws*) or both (little or nothing on Isocrates *Panegyricus* and *Panathenaicus*, or Aris-

tophanes *Knights*, *Wasps*, and *Plutus*). My goal is to trace a path through a long and complex literary conversation. I have sought to attend closely while they are at their most engaging, to authorial voices that seem especially interesting, yet also to keep abreast of what is going on in the background—jumping in (as it were) in the middle of a narrative, moving on to the next speaker once the point has been made but before the tale is done. My model is a lively oral debate among intelligent and competitive discussants, one in which no speaker is allowed to finish what he or she is saying before being interrupted by some equally articulate other.

The justification for proceeding in this somewhat idiorhythmic manner is this: whereas some of the ideas developed by individual Athenian writers are well known (there are books and articles on the political thought of each of the authors treated here), disciplinary compartmentalization has obscured the richness of the literary conversation among them (and their contemporaries), the relationship between their ideas and the wider sociopolitical context, and the interdependence of literary form and intellectual content. I do, of course, hope to contribute to a better understanding of specific texts and the thought of individual writers. I am mindful of the fact that many readers will not read this book from cover to cover: each of the following chapters seeks to elucidate the nature and force of specific political arguments developed by a given author, and individual chapters should be able to stand on their own. But a principle theme of this book is the *debate* among dissident Athenian intellectuals, a debate carried on both with one another and with democratic ideology. It therefore seemed important not to let any given voice appear to overwhelm the discussion—as, at various times in the writing of this book, Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle each threatened to do. And thus I keep turning (with real reluctance) away from one writer and toward the next, always somewhat too late and somewhat too early. No doubt this approach has drawbacks. But, because I am convinced that the value of a good debate exceeds the sum of its parts, I suppose that it has compensating virtues.

The classical authors discussed here are presented in chronological order. They lived very different lives and wrote in a variety of literary genres. Three of them (Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle) wrote monumental—even “epic” — texts universally regarded as crucial in the development of the Western tradition of political thought. The other four (Ps.-Xenophon, Aristophanes, Isocrates, and Ps.-Aristotle) are not typically featured in historical surveys of political theorizing. I have interleaved “major” and “minor” intellectual figures in a self-conscious attempt to enrich the textbook account of the development of Athenian political thought by working along the lines pioneered by Quentin Skinner in his magisterial work on the history of early modern political thought.⁸

My story (and the imagined debate) begins with Ps.-Xenophon’s identification of a basic sociopolitical problematic: the definitive role played by sociolog-

⁸ Skinner, *Foundations*.

ical (mass and elite) interests in determining the essential nature and functional articulation of a political regime acknowledged to be effective at achieving certain ends but regarded by elite writers as fundamentally unsatisfactory. That insight, although never abandoned, proved inadequate to solve the intellectual and practical “problem” posed to elite Greek intellectuals by Athenian democracy. Subsequent work by Thucydides, Aristophanes, Plato, and Isocrates focused on the ambiguous epistemological status of political speech acts, and on how the relationship between critical intellectuals, elite leaders, and mass audiences was shaped or deformed by democratic political culture in general and by the rhetorical environment in particular. That complex relationship had, in their several accounts, profound consequences for state policy, for the lives and reputations of critical intellectuals, and for the moral health of would-be leaders. A third, Aristotelian, generation sought to show how the demonstrated strengths of democratic political processes could be brought into harmony with aristocratic values through the exercise of practical reason, and might thereby preserve the ideal of participatory citizenship in a rapidly changing Greek world.

Ps.-Xenophon wrote his brief essay on the “political regime of the Athenians” in the mid- to late fifth century –well before the reign of the Thirty. Ps.-Xenophon asserted that Athenian democracy was no more and no less than the self-consciously self-interested rule of a sociological faction: the lower-class Athenians (i.e., the *demos*) recognized that they themselves lacked individual virtues or attainments, but they were, he claims, cunning enough to see that they could employ their majoritarian powers to constrain and compel virtuous, accomplished elites. Ps.-Xenophon, writing in the era of the great Athenian empire, establishes a central critical problem: Democratic Athens was at once immoral in its elevation of the “ordinary many who are bad” over the “elite few who are good” and tremendously successful in terms of its ability to focus and deploy state power. Moreover, in his view, Athenian democracy was neither capable of significant constitutional change nor easy to overthrow by revolutionary means. My discussion of the practical *aporia* identified by Ps.-Xenophon is followed by more detailed introductions to Athenian political culture, contextual intellectual history, and the critical community itself.

Thucydides, whose work on the history of the Peloponnesian War came to an end during or soon after the watershed reign of the Thirty, shared Ps.-Xenophon’s conviction that democracy tended to devolve into the rule of a self-interested social faction, but he regarded self-interest as insufficient, in and of itself, to explain the nature or fate (as he saw it) of participatory democracy. Thucydides emphasized the relationship between democratic leadership, public rhetoric, and mass audiences of decision-making citizens. He identified in that relationship what he regarded as a key epistemological problem: the Athenians made important decisions on the basis of speeches they heard, and they created “social facts” whenever they voted in their citizen Assembly. Yet the all-important distinction between these politically enacted “social facts” and the unalterable “brute facts” of nature tended to become blurred in the context of the awesome power wielded by the successful democratic state. For Thucydides,

the category errors encouraged by democratic political process and state power led to political crisis when Athenian leaders lost the capacity to control the ambitions and desires of the citizenry through speech—when the demos came to rule in fact as well as in name.

In the interest of situating grand “epic” texts in their intellectual context, we turn next to Aristophanes’ comedy *Ecclesiazusae* (Assemblywomen), one of only two surviving Aristophanic comedies that postdate the reign of the Thirty. Aristophanes makes comic fun with Thucydides’ epistemological problem. The plot of his play poses a hypothetical question that was at once humorous and serious: Could the “social fact” that citizenship was limited to Athenian *males* be altered by the simple expedient of a decree by the democratic Assembly proclaiming that Athenian *women* were now citizens? Or was the capacity for citizenship a “brute fact” of unalterable human nature? The play explores the limits imposed on democratic egalitarianism in the real world by traditional Greek values. It confronts the audience with the arbitrary nature of those limits and the democracy’s potential capacity for revising those values—for good or ill.

Scholars have long noted the substantial parallels between the “city of women” of Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae* and the “city in words” established in Plato’s *Republic*. Plato began writing political philosophy several years after the fall of the Thirty—in the aftermath of the judicial conviction and execution by the democratic state of his friend and teacher, Socrates (399 B.C.). In two early dialogues, the *Apology* and *Crito*, Plato’s Socrates develops a provisional “critical ethics” committing the would-be Socratic to a dangerous career of seeking to expose, often in public, the intellectual (and hence moral and political) errors of his fellows—and especially his fellow Athenian citizens. The Socratic critical ethics of the *Apology* and *Crito* assumes that the philosopher possesses both a capacity and a duty to improve others. The first of these assumptions is challenged by the argument of the *Gorgias*, in the context of an exploration of the roles of rhetoric, eros, and the servile nature of leadership in the democratic polis. The second assumption, that the philosopher is duty-bound to seek to improve his fellows, is demolished in the course of the grand political/meta-physical experiment that is the *Republic*. That monumental work sought to liberate philosophy from engagement in the political life of the real polis—but its overall literary form, the development of its arguments, and its ambition to establish a city in which “Socratic politics” might flourish, demonstrate the depth of Plato’s debt to the democratic political culture of his native polis.

Isocrates, a teacher of rhetoric and writer of epideictic (display) speeches, was among Plato’s foremost intellectual rivals, and he offers us some of the best evidence for the competitive “critical community” in action. In the *Antidosis*, Isocrates imagines himself in a situation nearly identical to that confronted by the historical Socrates: on trial for his life, accused of the crime of corrupting the youth of Athens. The *Antidosis* seeks to explain the complex relationship between teacher/political advisor, ambitious student/political leader,

and the democratic city—as exemplified by Isocrates, the general Timotheus, and Athens. Like Socrates’ “students” Critias (leader of the Thirty) and Alcibiades (Athenian general and sometime traitor), Isocrates’ student Timotheus ran into deep difficulties with the Athenian citizenry and came to be regarded as an enemy of democracy. Isocrates audaciously seeks to show why the example of Timotheus—far from proving that his rhetorical education was faulty—demonstrates that Isocratean “philosophy” (defined as the mastery of elegant verbal expression) alone holds out hope for reconciling the democratic city with capable and virtuous leaders. In a closely contemporary speech, the *Areopagiticus*, Isocrates sets about explaining to an elite audience how the Athenian democracy might be reformed by a return to what Isocrates argues were its pristine ancestral values of hierarchy and paternalism.

The critical agenda turns a corner with the work of Plato’s student, Aristotle. Unlike the other critical writers considered here, Aristotle was not a citizen (of Athens or, after the destruction of Stagira, of any other existing polis), and, in the *Politics*, he was less overtly concerned with the relationship between public speech and political leadership than were the earlier critics of democracy. Aristotle’s writing on politics was esoteric—directed imprimis to the closed circle of his own students rather than to the wider world of competitive Athenian intellectuals. Yet he demonstrates a deep awareness of the ways in which political issues were addressed by his intellectual predecessors, and he clearly seeks to improve upon them; Aristotle exists at once inside and outside democratic Athens and its critical community. Aristotelian political philosophy is typically regarded as displaying hierarchical and aristocratic characteristics. Yet elitism contends with a deeply egalitarian current in his thought. That current, arising from Aristotle’s internalization and naturalization of democratic values, is evident in the implications of his definition of the political animal as the adult male native of a polis: all such persons were, in some meaningful sense, “potential citizens.” In Athens, the set of “Aristotelian potential citizens” was closely coextensive with the actual citizenship. But (here the aristocratic viewpoint reasserts itself) Aristotle remained convinced that only a subset of adult males was capable of developing genuine political virtue, and he regarded a generalized virtuousness among citizens as an essential precondition to the polis’ achievement of its highest ends. The resolution of this problematic, and a solution to the practical *aporia* identified by Ps.-Xenophon, are found in Aristotle’s recommendations for the amelioration of “extreme” democracies (and oligarchies) and in his description of what is best thought of as a “democratic aristocracy”—a new polis in which all natural citizens were to be propertied, leisured, and virtuous. Political amelioration of existing regimes (as an alternative to revolution), and bringing a “best polis” into being *ab initio*, came to seem more realistic in light of Macedonian hegemony within Greece and an anticipated wave of overseas colonization.

If some of the arguments of Aristotle’s *Politics* were informed by broadened imperial horizons, his school was located in Athens, and its members remained

very aware of democracy as an Athenian cultural artifact. The last major work considered here, the Aristotelian *Athenaiōn politeia*, combines a teleological history of Athenian democracy with a matter-of-fact description of its current form. The *Athenaiōn politeia* was written shortly before the Macedonians replaced Athenian democracy with a moderate oligarchy. Its anonymous author is highly conscious of his place at the end of a long debate between critical writing and democratic political culture. Far from taking the role of an anti-democratic partisan, he pointedly highlights the moderation of the democrats in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Thirty, and he seeks to arbitrate fairly between his sources, coming down at key points in favor of overtly democratic interpretations of Athens' past. Democracy is, for Ps.-Aristotle, no longer the terrifying "beast" described by Plato in the *Republic*; it has become possible to regard Athenian popular rule as at once an "extreme" and a workable, even more or less "correct," form of government. The apparent slackening of critical hostilities invites an exploration of the extent to which—a century after Ps.-Xenophon—the spirit of dissent had accommodated itself to democracy, and, as a corollary, the ways in which Athenian democracy may have responded positively to legitimate concerns raised by dissident intellectuals. This working détente between democratic practice and its elite critics is arguably the precondition for the survival of democratic ideals into the Hellenistic era and beyond.

In sum, this book argues that classical Greek political thought arose from an extended, yet relatively (physically) nonviolent, battle for discursive authority between two powerful and multifaceted communities: the internally diverse Athenian citizenry and the internally competitive Athenian educated elite. It is because the encounter between Athenian democracy and literate dissenters was a protracted struggle between well-matched competitors over values of great and demonstrably transcultural import that the critical texts produced in democratic Athens delved so deeply and that they have remained so strikingly fresh and relevant to students of politics from the Renaissance to the present day. If this argument is along the right lines, then postclassical Western political thought is more than "a footnote to Plato"—it is a commentary, at one remove, on the first Western democracy and on the condition of freedom that democracy first made fully manifest.

One result of writing this book has been a renewed personal conviction of the moral value of participatory democracy. I have been repeatedly struck by the intellectual and emotional power exerted by each of the dissenting writers discussed here, and I have had much pleasure in the endeavor to engage at once empathetically and critically with their arguments. But I come away unconvinced that any of them offers us a form of government more choiceworthy than the rule of the people or a set of moral values more attractive than the conjoined freedom, political equality, and security of the citizenry and of each citizen. In order to reveal as clearly as possible what I see as the original force of arguments made by Greek critics of democracy, I have on occasion appealed to the fiction of an "ideal reader" who is more willing to be convinced than myself—the intelligent and sympathetic reader that every dissident writer hopes

will encounter his or her text. I have sometimes referred to this imagined reader as “she.” If some of my own readers are disconcerted by this convention, they are urged to think of Axiothea.⁹

⁹ According to Diogenes Laertius 3.46, a woman named Axiothea, having read a book of Plato’s *Republic*, came to the Academy dressed as a man and took part in discussions there. Cf. Clement of Alexandria *Stromateis* 4.122.2; *P. Oxyrhynchus* 3656; and Lynch, *Aristotle’s School*, 57. Whether or not Axiothea actually existed, the “imagined female reader” of critical literature is not a modern invention.

The Problem of Dissent: Criticism as Contest

A. BEGINNING AT A DEAD END: PS.-XENOPHON *POLITICAL REGIME OF THE ATHENIANS*

And as for the fact that the Athenians have chosen the kind of political regime (*politeia*) that they have, I do not speak well of them (*ouk epainō*) on that account inasmuch as in making their choice they have chosen to have lowly scoundrels (*ponēroi*) fare better than the excellent elite (*chrēstoi*). Therefore, on this account I do not speak well of them. But since they have resolved to have it so (*edoxen . . . autois*), I intend to point out how well they preserve their *politeia* and accomplish those other things for which the rest of the Greeks criticize them (Ps.-Xen. *Ath. pol.* 1.1)

With these lines an anonymous Greek author, writing sometime in the latter half of the fifth century B.C., introduces a short, polemical tract called *The Political Regime of the Athenians* (*Athēnaiōn politeia*). The tract was already erroneously attributed to the well-known Athenian author, Xenophon, in the first century B.C. (Diogenes Laertius 2.57). Since the nineteenth century of our era, its author has been nicknamed the “Old Oligarch” after the tendentious political tone of the essay. The only real clue to Ps.-Xenophon’s identity is his distinctively Attic (i.e., Athenian) dialect. Despite the distance he establishes between himself and the Athenian citizen-masses by referring to Athenians as “they,” he occasionally does speak of the Athenians in the first-person plural, as “us” (twice at 1.12). Our author was evidently an Athenian –or at least he took considerable pains to adopt an Athenian literary persona. There has been much debate over the precise date of the essay, but for present purposes it is enough to say that it is a product of the so-called Golden Age, an era when the Athenian democracy was robust, the Athenian overseas empire was flourishing, and Athenian sea power was preeminent (ca. 450–413 B.C.).¹

Whatever its precise date, Ps.-Xenophon’s little essay is almost certainly our earliest extant example of Athenian literary (as opposed to epigraphic) prose. It

¹ Greek text: Bowersock, “Pseudo-Xenophon,” 47–55. Translation with introduction: Bowersock, “[Xenophon]: Constitution.” Commentary: Frisch, *Constitution*. Ps.-Xenophon’s Attic (with some admixture of Ionic elements): Bowersock, “[Xenophon]: Constitution,” 461. Date: Bowersock, “Pseudo-Xenophon,” 33–38 (440s); Ste. Croix *Origins*, 307–10 (post-431, perhaps 424); Gomme, “Old Oligarch,” 68 (420–415). Ps.-Xenophon’s fifth-century context: Ostwald *From Popular Sovereignty*, 188–91; Yunis, *Taming*, 46–50. Frisch (*Constitution*, 88–105) speculates on “the author’s person,” concluding he was an Athenian writing in exile. On the question of literary personae in Greek literature, see Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*. There is a third example of the use of first-person plural at 1.11 if one accepts Marchant’s OCT conjecture of λαμβάνωμεν [we take] for the λαμβάνων μεν of the codices.

is also among the earliest extant Greek texts to take democracy as its primary subject and to assess democracy in an overtly critical voice.² And so the distinguished tradition of classical Athenian literary prose begins, for us, at about the same time as the equally distinguished tradition of Athenian literature critical of popular rule. Moreover, and remarkably, in light of the text's brevity and its author's redundant and rambling style, this tract introduces many of the major arguments against democracy that will be debated by democracy's most thoughtful Greek critics.

The tradition of writing critically about democracy in democratic Athens that begins with Ps.-Xenophon lasted for roughly a century. It concludes with another text, also entitled *The Political Regime of the Athenians*, produced in Aristotle's Lyceum shortly before the end of the period of genuine political independence for Athens and the other Greek city-states.³ During that hundred years, from the late fifth century to the late fourth century B.C., the list of authors of texts overtly critical of democracy represents a high percentage of known Athenian prose writers. The outstanding exceptions are the Attic orators, who wrote speeches delivered in the citizen Assembly, the people's courts, and over the war dead. Furthermore, given that Attic Old Comedy is invariably critical of aspects of Athenian political practice, much of the surviving poetry from this era may also be characterized as critical of democracy.⁴

We need not suppose that every Athenian intellectual of the late classical period was first and foremost a "critic of popular rule." The extant corpus does, however, point to a broad and deep critical literary tradition, a tradition that was flourishing within a hundred years of the revolution of 508/7 B.C., the event that set Athens on the road to full democracy.⁵ This book examines some particularly rich and complex texts from within that tradition. While these works were not chosen at random, neither are they unique—the reader should keep in mind that each of the texts considered here points to and arises from larger Athenian (and ultimately Hellenic) traditions of literature, politics, and social relations. Although I will discuss substantive and verbal similarities between the several texts treated here, I do not propose that these similarities demonstrate a strongly intertextual relationship between just these texts. Rather, similarities in concepts and wording among the works discussed here indicate the development of a vocabulary of ideas and terminology shared by a more exten-

² Earliest Athenian prose writer: Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty*, 132. Aristophanes was an approximate contemporary, so (leaving aside tragedy) the earliest extant Athenian poetry overtly critical of democracy is roughly contemporaneous with Ps.-Xenophon.

³ Ps.-Aristotle's text dates to 332–322 B.C. Democracy was abolished in Athens by the victorious Macedonians after the Lamian War of 322. See below, 7.A. On the expansive literary genre of the *politeia* (Xenophon *Politeia of the Lacedaemonians* is another extant example) and the differences between Ps.-Xenophon and Ps.-Aristotle, see Keaney, *Composition*, 3ff.

⁴ The Attic orators, too, are critical of current practice of democracy, but work within a somewhat different critical tradition; see below, 5.A. I do not include Herodotus in the "critical community," and I leave to one side the issue of whether or not Greek tragedy should be regarded as critical of democracy; see 1.C.2 with 1.n.72 and 2.n.6.

⁵ The revolution of 508/7 and its importance: Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 32–52.

sive “community of political critics.” Members of that informal community wrote in response to one another, but they also sought to respond to the political culture of democratic Athens itself. It is only by respecting the particularities of individual texts *and* remaining alert to each text’s wider literary and sociopolitical contexts that the intellectual historian can hope to make sense of the relationship between Greek political literature and sociopolitical history. And it is only by trying to make sense of this relationship that he can hope to say anything new or worthwhile about Greek political culture. If we lose track of either the particular or the general, text or context, we will have thinned out our analysis unjustifiably, and we risk falling prey to narrow-minded antiquarianism on the one hand, or hopelessly vague theorizing on the other.⁶

So saying, let us pose a few questions of Ps.-Xenophon’s brief essay—about its content, form, audience, and (borrowing the philosophical language of J. L. Austin, below, B.3) illocutionary force. First, what is it that our putative Old Oligarch found so troubling about Athenian society and political practices that he felt compelled to complain in writing? What is the *substantive content* of his political criticism? Next, how does he express himself? What is the *generic form* taken by his critical expression? And finally, what was his intended readership? For whom was he writing and *what did he intend* for them to do as a result of having read his essay on Athenian political practices and culture? The first two sets of questions, regarding content and form, can be answered by reading the text with some care. The last set of questions, which involves the complex and contentious issue of authorial intention, is more difficult and can be answered only provisionally, by attempting to situate the essay within a specific literary and political context.⁷

A.1. Democracy as Demotic Self-Interest

For Ps.-Xenophon, the nub of the problem was that the Athenian democracy not only preserved itself, but grew greater and stronger, as a result of the excessively energetic activity of the lower classes of citizens, especially through their service as rowers in the Athenian navy (1.2). The linchpin of his argument, which connects his expression of deep distaste for the Athenian *politeia* with his glowing description of its functional efficacy, is that the hyperactivity of the

⁶ Influential contemporary approaches to intellectual history include the contextualism of Skinner and Pocock (below 1.n.32) and the literary postmodernism of White, *Metahistory*; LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*; LaCapra and Kaplan, *Modern European Intellectual History*. Hexter, *On Historians*, offers a witty and opinionated survey. See further below, 1.B.1.

⁷ There have been many attempts to define the Old Oligarch’s seemingly confused political stance, often resorting to biographical fantasy. Gomme, “Old Oligarch,” demonstrates that much in Ps.-Xenophon’s portrait of Athens is patently false, but argues that it was not the author’s object to tell the simple truth. He concludes that the work is serious (not an amusing satire), academic and sophistic in approach (but not by one of the known Sophists), and meant to be clever and to explain to foreigners the consistency of Athens’ self-interested policy. Cole (*Origins*, 102–4) updates Gomme’s survey of scholarly opinion, concluding (I think improbably) that the *Ath. pol.* is a rhetorical *technē*, a compendium of good and bad arguments for praising Athens to a hostile audience.

Athenian citizen-masses was rationally self-interested behavior. Indeed, if the democrats were to allow the wealthy elite (*hoi plousioi kai hoi chrēstoi*) to flourish, they would succeed only in creating a powerful opposition to themselves, because “everywhere on earth the better class of people is opposed to democracy” (1.4 –5). Why is this?

Because among the best people there is minimum wantonness and injustice but a maximum of scrupulous care for what is good, whereas among the common people (*ho dēmos*) there is a maximum of ignorance, disorder, and wickedness; for poverty draws them rather into disgraceful actions, and because of a lack of money some men are characterized by lack of cultural education (*apaideusia*) and simple ignorance (*amathia*). (1.5)

This is an admirably straightforward and succinct statement of the elitist anti-democratic position: Democracy is the self-interested rule of the wicked and inferior many who are poor over the few who are rich and good. The few show themselves to be good by their behavior: they are self-controlled, just, and careful in their actions. The many, by contrast, demonstrate their wickedness by their ignorance, lack of culture, and disorderly behavior. Economic class is therefore a primary source of human behavior; it is directly, rather than contingently, associated with moral conduct. The lack of cultured refinement on the part of the demos is a product of poverty; those who must work for a living necessarily engage in shameful and morally corrupting menial activities. Democracy is thus marked for Ps.-Xenophon by the hegemonic political authority of those who are necessarily inferior, both morally and culturally, over their betters.

For Ps.-Xenophon, democracy in the Athenian style is the overt and (our author would have us believe) self-conscious political domination of society by one social class (demos = “the poor”) in its own class interest. The demos in question is not conceived of as “the citizenry as a whole” or as synecdoche for “the polis.”⁸ Indeed, Ps.-Xenophon contrasts that which is good for the polis with that which is good for democracy. He says that allowing any wretch to speak his mind in public assembly is not a recipe for making the best polis, but it is good for preserving *dēmokratia*, since the ordinary people prefer to be free and to rule rather than to live in a regime under which they themselves would be slaves (1.6–8). And so,

what *you (su)* consider bad government is the very source of the demos’ strength and freedom. If it is good government (*eunomia*) you seek, you will first observe the most accomplished men establishing the laws in their own interests. Then the elite (*chrēstoi*) will punish the scoundrels (*ponēroi*); the elite will make policy for

⁸ Demos, which meant “the entire citizenry” or “the Assemblymen” when used by democrats (see esp. the speech of Athenagoras in Thucydides 6.39.1, below 2.n.68), was used as a class term (the nonleisured, nonaristocratic many: roughly synonymous with *to plēthos* and *hoi polloi*) by elitist writers. See Donlan, “Changes”; Raaflaub, “Democracy, Oligarchy,” 524 with n. 36; OberMass, 4 with n. 2, and *Athenian Revolution*, 117–19. For a theory of how ideological conflict may be encapsulated within a word, see Petrey, *Realism*, 43–46.

the polis and will not allow madmen to deliberate on policy or to speak their minds or to meet in Assembly. As a result of these excellent measures, the demos would swiftly fall into slavery. (1.8–9)

Here we have our first clear indication of the intended audience. This essay is written for an imagined readership of persons, addressed here in the second-person singular (“you”), who share the author’s opinions on proper political order (called here *eunomia*) but who have failed to grasp the fact that democracy is the rationally self-interested rule of the lower classes.

The imagined reader regards government by a mob of madmen to be a lunatic system. Our author seeks to show him that democracy is actually rational enough, but only when viewed from the perspective of the class in whose interest it functions. Democracy appears insane only when regarded from the perspective of an excellent elite fellow “like yourself.” It is, evidently, simply a matter of your point of view: if you are poor and inferior, you naturally see the advantages of *dēmokratia*—especially the freedom of the many; if you are rich and excellent, the advantages of *eunomia*, under which the demos is enslaved, are equally self-evident. The justification for the essay under consideration is that its author has in effect developed a “double vision” —he has somehow learned to stand back from the blinkered viewpoint of his own class and is able to perceive the world from the position of both the aristocrat and the democrat. This “objective” standpoint allows him to grasp the sociopolitical logic underlying both *dēmokratia* and *eunomia*: both systems are predicated on a completely rational pursuit of self-interest on the part of a sociological subset of the polis’ population. The author’s pose of analytical objectivity does not entail moral relativism. He continues to regard the rule of the demos as the rule of the wicked. But he does grant that it is not unreasonable for even the wicked to prefer ruling and being free to being enslaved.⁹ Thus he can describe to his fellow elites the underlying rationality of the seemingly “mad” perspective of the demos. This explanation provides him with the necessary premise for explaining the paradoxical successes of the democratic state.

The Old Oligarch’s lesson proceeds from his central insight regarding self-interest to an explanation of various Athenian practices that must appear peculiar, or even inexplicable, from an elite perspective. First there is the shocking phenomenon of the uppity behavior (*akolasia*) of slaves and resident foreigners (metics). In Athens, “you” are not permitted to hit them at will, nor will they stand aside for you. The explanation for this state of affairs is that the lower-class individuals constituting the Athenian demos are no better dressed nor any more handsome than individual slaves and metics. If an elite gentleman were allowed free license to strike slaves at will, he might well strike an Athenian citizen, mistaking him for a slave (1.10). And so it was in order to ensure their own physical security that the demos forbade the casual beating of slaves.

⁹ Here, Ps.-Xenophon strikingly endorses the general principle enunciated by Dunn (“Trans-cultural Significance,” 105) that, all things being equal, humans prefer to be free in the simple sense of not being directly subject to the will of others.

Moreover, even the Athenian willingness to grant equality (*isēgoria*) to metics and slaves, to allow slaves to become rich, and to manumit slaves is rational (*eikotōs*, 1.11–12), because a naval power requires the availability of capital (*chrēmata*) and a variety of specialized trades (*technai*). Metics provide the necessary skills, whereas money is acquired by taking a portion of the earnings of slaves. If, as was the case at (oligarchic) Sparta, your slave feared me, he might simply give up making money so as not to be at risk on account of his possession of wealth. Ps.-Xenophon implies that would not be a problem for the Spartans, whose land-based military organization did not demand the accumulation of capital, whereas for the Athenians, the drying-up of the capital resources now gained by extracting the surplus value of slave labor would impair the operations of the navy. The underlying premise of the argument is, once again, self-interest. The slave will accumulate a surplus of money only if his possession of some part of it is secure. Because the Athenian demos can appropriate a percentage of a slave's earnings (and use that money for its own selfish purposes by maintaining its naval power), it encourages the slave to make (and save) lots of money by allowing him equality with citizens, by ensuring his physical security, and by holding out to him the chance of eventual manumission.¹⁰

So, too, the Athenian system of imposing gymnastic, choregic, and trierarchic liturgies upon wealthy citizens is explained simply as a means of redistributing wealth (1.13). The wealthy (*plousioi*) are made to pay for the gymnastic contests, the choruses, and the outfitting of the warships, whereas it is the poor members of the demos who “take money” for participating in the games, serving in the choruses, and rowing the ships. Thus, rather than a system that allows for the defense and glorification of the polis, the state-imposed liturgies are redescribed as a mechanism for taking wealth from the rich, who therefore become poorer, and giving it to the demos, whose members become “rich.” Likewise, the people's courts are not established by the Athenians to secure justice (*to dikaion*), but to assure that their own interest (*to sumphoron*) is served (1.13).

Similarly selfish considerations explain the Athenian policies of expropriating elite resources, executing aristocrats, establishing democracies throughout the empire (1.14–15), and forcing imperial subjects to try their cases in Athens (1.16–18):

As it is now, each one of the allies is compelled to flatter the Athenian demos from the realization that judicial action for anyone who comes to Athens is in the hands of none other than the demos—this indeed is the law in Athens. In the courts he is

¹⁰ The Greek text is partially corrupt here; see Bechtle, “Note,” which discusses the difficulties and offers a sensible solution. The point, for Ps.-Xenophon, is that because the Athenians enter into legally binding financial agreements with their slaves, under the terms of which the slaves are eventually able to manumit themselves, the free Athenians are not able to do whatever they wish in respect to slaves and are therefore “slaves to slaves.”

obliged to entreat whoever [of the jurors] comes in and to grasp him by the hand. In this way the allies have become instead the slaves of the Athenian people. (1.18)

By now the Old Oligarch's argument has expanded considerably. He reveals to his reader that the Athenian empire itself is not to be understood simply as an expression of the military power and greatness of Athens as a unitary polis, but rather as another product of the Athenian demos' rationally self-interested behavior. Imperial subjects are merely another category of revenue-producing slaves of the Athenian demos who are treated reasonably well because they produce what the demos needs.

A.2. *Public Pleasures and Private Perversity*

The maintenance of the empire through sea power allows the Athenian demos to enjoy in public all the luxuries that are elsewhere the private and unique prerogatives of the rich and elite. The demos realizes that it is impossible for each and every one of the many to offer fancy sacrifices to the gods, to give lavish dinners, to set up sacred shrines, or to manage (*oikein*) a great and beautiful polis (2.9). They do, however, desire the advantages that accrue from these activities. Therefore, rather than attempting to participate in these various activities individually, they undertake them collectively and publicly (*dēmosiai*), and so "the mob has more pleasure of these things than the wealthy few" (2.10).¹¹ This collectivization of responsibility for pleasure has its counterpart in the refusal of the political collectivity to take responsibility for its own political decisions. According to Ps.-Xenophon, oligarchic cities must keep their alliances and stick by sworn oaths, since these agreements are guaranteed by the names of the responsible individuals who entered into them. Yet the anonymous agreements of the Athenian demos can be easily be repudiated

by referring the blame to the one man who spoke [in the citizen Assembly] or took the vote, while the others declare that they were absent or did not approve of the things agreed upon (*ta sunkeimena*) in the full Assembly. If it seems advisable for their decisions not to be effective, they invent a myriad of excuses for not doing what they do not want to do. And if there are bad results from the demos' plans, the demos alleges that a few persons (*oligoi*), working against them, ruined their plans; but if there is a good result, they take the credit for themselves. (2.17)

The point here is that when it comes to inter-state affairs, the self-interested demos in a democracy has a clear advantage over the self-interested few in an oligarchy because of the institutional procedures typical of each regime. Oligarchs, who engage in politics as individuals, retain a strong sense of individual responsibility for agreements contracted in the state's name. By contrast, democratic collectivization of political activity, by removing the signature of the

¹¹ Schmitt Pantel (*Cité*, 231–32) notes that this is the only fifth-century text to mention the division of sacrificial meat and suggests that it is not only the material distribution, but the civic equality implied by the ritual, that is at stake. For the Athenian reality (well documented only in the fourth century), compare *ibid.*, 121–43, 243–52; Rosivach, *System*.

individual as the sign of binding assent, means that the responsibility for decisions or actions that turn out badly can be reassigned by the true but collective political agent (the demos) to a convenient nameable individual scapegoat (the proposer, vote taker, or suspected oligarchic sympathizers). This institutionalized dishonesty allows the democratic polis to enjoy an unparalleled flexibility in foreign policy—inter-state agreements that conduce to the democratic state's advantage are maintained; those that come to seem disadvantageous may be summarily repudiated. Once again, democracy is shown to be a uniquely immoral regime that is consequently uniquely efficient in gaining the selfish ends of a ruling sociological faction.

After a digression regarding the limits of demotic self-criticism in dramatic comedy (2.18), claiming that the demos refuses to allow itself to be mocked but encourages the mockery of those in private life (*idiai*) who are likely to be “rich, or wellborn, or powerful,”¹² Ps.-Xenophon sums up his argument (2.19) with an emphatic expression of his own opinion: “I myself say (*phēmi oun egōge*) that the Athenian demos knows perfectly well which of the citizens are excellent and which are scoundrels.” Yet despite this knowledge, the masses befriend (*philousi*) persons who, while despicable, are well suited and useful to themselves, and they hate those who are excellent. And why is this? Because the masses do not believe that the virtue (*aretē*) of the excellent is by its nature (*pephukenai*) conducive to their own good, but rather they suppose that it is conducive to their detriment.

This last comment fits with and extends the logic of the argument. The demotic masses, like the author himself (but unlike his imagined reader), recognize that people tend to act in their own self-interest, and they regard an excellent character as something naturally distinct from and hostile to their own corrupted nature. Ergo the demos hates elite persons on the sensible grounds that they cannot trust excellent men to act both irrationally and immorally in seeking to further demotic interests. Thus, despite its ability to distinguish excellence from depravity, the demos acts rationally in choosing to reject good men and to cultivate scoundrels. Yet, on the other side of the socioeconomic divide, there is considerable evidence of what we might term “elite false consciousness”: “On the other hand there are some who are truly on the side of the demos (*alēthōs tou dēmou*) although they are not democrats by nature (*tēn phusin ou dēmotikoi*)” (2.19). Here Ps.-Xenophon identifies what must be, for a man of his opinions, a particularly insidious phenomenon: some persons, while clearly elite by “nature” (that is, wealthy, wellborn, powerful: cf. 2.18), perversely choose to give themselves over to, literally to “belong to,” the demos. And it is this willful behavior, rather than their inborn nature, that is the mark of what they “truly” are.¹³

¹² Although powerful men are indeed mercilessly lampooned in Old Comedy, Ps.-Xenophon is not accurate when he claims that comedians did not mock the demos or the democratic polity itself; see Gomme, “Old Oligarch,” 43–45; and below, Chapter 3.

¹³ Cf. the key importance of the concept of *alētheia* as “objective truth” in Thucydides: below, 2.A.1.

Observation of this perverse elite behavior and recognition of its central significance are surely among the factors that prompted Ps.-Xenophon to write his essay on the subject of “democracy as the self-interest of the inferior.”

I pardon the demos themselves for their democracy. One must forgive everyone for looking after his own interests. But whoever is not of the demos and yet chooses to be a participant (*oikein*) in a democratic polis rather than in an oligarchic one has prepared himself with the resources for doing wrong, and he has realized that it is easier for an evil man to escape notice in a democratic polis than in an oligarchic one. (2.20)

If we translate the verb *oikein* in this passage in its broadest sense as “to maintain one’s residence in a place,” this passage can be read as a blanket condemnation of the entire elite population of Athens. It suggests that the *only* reason a wealthy, wellborn Athenian would choose to remain in Athens (rather than, we might suppose, choosing to live as a metic in an oligarchic polis) is a corruptly self-interested desire to do evil without being detected. This would, in turn, mean either that our Athenian author is himself a secretive evildoer or that he has chosen to live abroad as a metic.

Though none of these conclusions is impossible, it seems more likely that *oikein* here has a somewhat narrower meaning and that Ps.-Xenophon is specifically criticizing those elites who choose to work actively in furthering the interests of the demos, for example, by serving as voluntary liturgists, as public speakers in the Assembly, or as elected officials.¹⁴ In any event, the passage points to a body of persons who, although elite, choose to live in Athens and to cooperate voluntarily with the ruling demos; in so doing they subsume their natural interests as elites to the interests of the poor and many who rule in the democracy. If the elites in question are aware of what they are doing, Ps.-Xenophon’s argument from self-interest must explain such behavior as motivated by a self-conscious desire to do wrong and get away with it.

Yet if we suppose that Ps.-Xenophon’s didactic purpose in writing was the instruction of an elite readership that included elite Athenians, his text as a whole may point to a counterexplanation. Some Athenian elites simply failed to see democracy for what (in Ps.-Xenophon’s view) it really was, that is, government by a specific social class in its own selfish interest. Ignorant of democracy’s actual nature, some elites cooperated with the democratic government because they assumed a compatibility between their own true interests as elite individuals and the interests of the individual members of the demos. They assumed this compatibility, we may suppose, because they thought of the polis and its citizenry as a unitary whole. They failed to recognize the polis’ status as an environment for the competition for spoils among mutually hostile social subgroups, engaged in a zero-sum game. They imagined, perhaps, that all Athenians shared a common set of values and concerns, and so they fondly imag-

¹⁴ Cf. *oikein* as “management” at Ps.-Xenophon 2.9, and Thucydides’ use of *oikein* as “active participation/management” in a key passage (2.37.1) of the Funeral Oration of Pericles in which democracy is defined: below, 2.C.3; cf. Thuc. 3.37.3, 6.82.3, 8.67.1.

ined all Athenians as being eager to further a cohesive set of Athenian interests and goals. Ps.-Xenophon's text seems intended, at least in part, to enlighten these benighted souls. The importance of the passage cited above is underlined by the next sentence (3.1), which recapitulates the text's opening sentence:

And as for the *politeia* of the Athenians, I do not speak well of its form (*tropos*), but since they have resolved to be a democracy, they seem to me to have preserved the democracy well by making use of that means which I have pointed out (*epedeixa*).

The means in question is acting forthrightly and self-consciously in their own self-interest. By analogy, the text seems to exhort its elite reader to wake up and begin doing likewise.

A.3. *What Is to Be Done? Ps.-Xenophon's aporia*

Given the power of the democracy to achieve its own bad ends and to befuddle and corrupt "good" people, Ps.-Xenophon's elite reader may feel that it is time to do something about democracy. But what, exactly, would that actually entail? Just what is Ps.-Xenophon's elite reader to do once he has mastered the lesson offered by the text, and his eyes have been opened to the incompatibility between democracy and his own interests? The answer is not at all clear in that (given Ps.-Xenophon's premises) it appears unlikely that the Athenian *politeia* can be reformed, at least by peaceful and constitutional means. A consideration of why ambassadors from other poleis find it difficult to get the attention of the Athenian council or Assembly leads Ps.-Xenophon into a description of the great body of public business that was necessarily transacted annually at Athens. It turns out that all of this business is, in one way or another, indispensable to the maintenance of the democratic polis. This demonstration leads in its turn to a significant conclusion: the circumstances being what they were, Ps.-Xenophon denies "that it is possible for affairs at Athens to be otherwise than they now are" —except perhaps for tinkering with some small and unspecified details (3.8). Substantial sociopolitical change is simply impossible "without removing some part of the democracy." The author goes on to claim that one could indeed find many ways to make the Athenian *politeia* better, but his point is that "it is not, however, easy to discover a means whereby the democracy may continue to exist but sufficient at the same time to provide a superior *politeia*" (3.9) —except, once again, by fiddling with a few details here and there.

This is a very significant conclusion: democracy is at once wicked, efficient at preserving itself, and—as the reader now learns—incapable of significant internal amelioration. The text thus inevitably suggests to a sympathetic elite reader the desirability of revolutionary action aimed at overthrowing the existing democratic *politeia*. It is only by a democracy-ending revolution that "a superior *politeia*" —an oligarchy of some sort—can be brought about. Ps.-Xenophon now turns to the issue of civil war between the demos and the elite; but

his attention is at first focused on the foreign policy of the democratic polis rather than on how to effect a counterrevolution at Athens. He points out that the Athenian demos acts immorally (from his elite perspective on what is best) and yet, as always, efficiently in its own interests by tending to support the lower classes among Athens' imperial subjects: "This they do deliberately, for if they preferred the upper class (*tous beltious*), they would be choosing those who are contrary-minded to themselves" (3.10). And indeed, as he points out in a historical aside, whenever in the past the Athenians did support the elite in one of the subject states, it turned out badly for the Athenians (3.11).

Once again, the Athenian demos is portrayed as correctly identifying its own class interest and acting accordingly; moreover, the reader now realizes that the demotic tendency to act in self-interest is conditioned not only by innate selfishness but by a history of experience with misguided benevolence toward elite groups. The rationally self-interested demos cannot willingly compromise its monopoly on political power at home and will be hostile to oligarchies abroad. The argument suggests that to the extent that Athens is a successful and aggressively expansionist imperial power, Athenian democracy will tend to make the entire Greek world increasingly unsafe for oligarchy. Therefore, simply choosing to live abroad may not be a rational long-term strategy for the Athenian aristocrat, and Athenian aristocrats are shown to have an shared interest with oligarchs elsewhere in the Greek world in doing something about Athenian democracy. If it is impossible to make fundamental improvements in the *politeia* so long as the democracy continues to exist, a rationally self-interested elite Greek might reasonably choose to focus his energies on terminating the Athenian democracy. But what are the chances of actually effecting sweeping revolutionary change at Athens?

This possibility is alluded to rather elliptically in the concluding paragraph of the text. The paragraph begins in medias res: "But someone might interject that no one has been unjustly disenfranchised at Athens" (3.12). What is the argument against which this claim is hypothetically counterpoised? The implied context would have been clear enough to Ps.-Xenophon's intended readers. In the late-fifth-century Greek polis, the ordinary stake in a civil conflict was enfranchisement—membership in the political community of the polis—and thus the end result of revolutionary action that changed the *politeia* was a change in the composition of the citizen body.¹⁵ And thus, the probable supporters of a revolutionary movement were the disenfranchised—and most especially categories of persons who regarded their collective disenfranchisement as unjust. Ps.-Xenophon replies to his hypothetical interlocutor that although a few men had in fact been unjustly disenfranchised (i.e., expelled from the community of citizens) by the Athenians for official malfeasance of one sort or another, the number was very small indeed, "but to attack the democracy at Athens not a

¹⁵ On this passage of Ps.-Xenophon, cf. Gomme, "Old Oligarch," 61–62, 67–68. The association of revolutionary change in the *politeia* with a change in the dominant element in the citizen body (*politeuma*) is a key issue for Aristotle in the *Politics*; see below, 6.D.

few (*oligoi*) are required.” Successful revolution apparently requires “many” (*polloi*) who, because they are unjustly disenfranchised, will support a change in regime. At this point in the essay, Ps.-Xenophon’s use of “demos” as a synonym for *hoi polloi* pays out. With the demos/many securely in control, it is impossible to suppose that “many” will be disenfranchised, and so revolution is shown to be impossible on the original (sociological) premises of the argument. Ps.-Xenophon concludes his lesson: At Athens, where it was the members of the demos who held the magistracies, how would anyone suppose that “the many” (*hoi polloi*) would ever be disenfranchised? And so, “in view of these considerations, one must not think that there is any danger at Athens from the disenfranchised” (3.13).

With these words, the text ends. The elite author of *The Political Regime of the Athenians* leads his newly enlightened elite reader smack into a brick wall and abandons him there. Having just been taught the nature of his class interest, and that his interest lies in reforming or overthrowing the democracy, the reader now learns that the democracy can be neither substantially revised nor overthrown by political revolution. Ps.-Xenophon’s text is profoundly aporetic: re-description of the *politeia* of the Athenians in the terms of collective irresponsibility and sociological self-interest yields what seems (at least at first glance) a satisfactory elitist explanation for the observed phenomenon of Athenian success as a polis. But the text ends in an injunction to its imagined elite reader not to act. The catalogue of realia leads the assumed reader to conclude that the revolutionary action he has been encouraged to regard as desirable has no hope of success in light of the inclusivist tendencies of the Athenian demos. There is simply nowhere to go from here, and, not surprisingly, the text itself terminates.¹⁶

If Ps.-Xenophon stands at the beginning of an Athenian tradition of writing critically about democratic politics, that tradition begins with an *aporia*. For a reader who seeks guidance in practice as well as understanding, the force of the text’s conclusion is to foreclose the political action that would seem to be the logical response to its own description and analysis of the democratic polity. Ps.-Xenophon leads us to suppose that the practical *aporia* is a direct product of democracy’s capacity to assimilate and enervate potential opposition, to stifle those who might be its enemies by drawing them into its own center and luring them into playing the games of politics and privilege by its own rules. Ps.-Xenophon’s essay may be summed up as claiming that the democracy is explicable, despicable, and invincible. Evidently, the better “you” (the “outsider” elite Athenian or Athenian subject) understand the democratic beast and its ways, the

¹⁶ An alternative explanation is to assume that the text of Ps.-Xenophon as we have it is only a fragment. See Bowersock, “[Xenophon]: Constitution,” 463: “The opening sentence of the treatise suggests an extract from a larger work, and there seems to be no conclusion.” In light of the roughness of Ps.-Xenophon’s style, which is characterized by “harsh transitions, as well as leaps of thought, which can be shown, however, to make sense in most cases” (Bechtle, “Note,” 566), there is no way to demonstrate or falsify this contention. But rather than supply an entirely hypothetical textual context, I have chosen to try to make sense of the text as we have it by assessing it within a definable literary and social context.

more appalled and yet overawed you are by it. And so, in the context of Athenian democracy, knowledge yields impotence.

Moreover, it is not entirely clear that our author is quite so true to the principle of oligarchy as his modern nickname implies. The Old Oligarch's mask of ironic admiration for how well the Athenian demos has feathered its own nest and moral disapproval of the resulting corrupt *politeia* occasionally seems to slip; in at least one passage, he expresses what sounds like genuine admiration not only for the democracy's diabolical efficiency, but for the justness of its political practices. In discussing the backlog of the Athenian court system, Ps.-Xenophon begins with his usual disdain, pointing out the high number of malefactors who must be dealt with annually by relatively few Athenian courts (3.6). But then:

All right, yet someone will say that they ought to judge cases, but that fewer people should do the judging. Unless they have only a few courts [a few courts with large juries: the current practice], there will necessarily be few jurors in each court [many courts with small juries: a hypothetical alternative], so that it will be easier to adapt oneself [as litigant] to a few jurors and to bribe them, and easier to judge much less justly. (3.7)

Ripped out of its literary context, this equation of small juries with a radically increased potential for injustice, and by implication its linkage of the large mass juries typical of the democracy with superior justice, could easily be taken for an apologia for the people's courts by a sincere Athenian democrat. The implied argument (which will be more fully developed by Aristotle, below, 6.C.3) seems to be that large democratic juries are capable of aggregating the (limited) individual capacities for judgment of the jurors and of avoiding corruption (by flattery or bribery), and thus they tend to make decisions that are substantively more just than those made by smaller groups. One might be tempted to accuse our author of falling prey to just the sort of "elite false consciousness" that he criticizes in others.

Ps.-Xenophon's *Political Regime of the Athenians* is generally regarded by modern philologists as stylistically flawed. Glen W. Bowersock describes the prose fairly enough as

repetitive and often . . . awkward. Not that the author . . . eschewed all elegance, but rather that he was not very good at it. . . . the sequence of arguments is lacking in smoothness and clarity. . . . The writer's prose is often rough and ugly, and perfect lucidity is not always a friend to him; he repeats himself.¹⁷

And yet, awkward as it is, this text can hardly be the product of an unintelligent bungler. It has often been noted by modern scholars that Ps.-Xenophon's emphasis on the complex relationship between naval power, revenues, empire, and democracy recalls Thucydides.¹⁸ Moreover, the focus on democracy as the self-

¹⁷ Bowersock, "[Xenophon]: Constitution," 461, 469. Cf. Frisch, *Constitution*, 164–84; Gomme, "Old Oligarch," 58–61.

¹⁸ Frisch, *Constitution*, 79–87 (with table of correspondences); Bowersock, "[Xenophon]: Constitution," 464–65; de Romilly, "Pseudo-Xénophon et Thucydide."

interested rule of the “uncultured” lower classes anticipates a central argument of Aristotle’s *Politics*. The aporetic discussion of democratic inclusiveness sketches out a central problematic that is explored in more detail by each of the writers discussed below. Indeed, as we shall see (below, 1.C), many of the major, substantive arguments deployed by later Athenian critics against popular rule can be detected, at least in embryonic form, in Ps.-Xenophon’s short text. If we allow for its brevity and compression, it is not so much the substantive content of the arguments that distinguishes Ps.-Xenophon from his Athenian successors in the project of political dissent as it is the structure and style of his text. Ps.-Xenophon has the “right” material, but he seems incapable of putting it all together. In stark contrast to the distinguished *Nachleben* of its central argument on self-interest, and despite the existence of an Aristotelian text by the same name, Ps.-Xenophon’s *Political Regime of the Athenians* has no very obvious generic successors in surviving classical literature. While “the *politieia* of *x*” remained a common enough title for short political monographs (see below, 7.A), the authorial tone of indignation combined with ironic admiration is unique, as is the attempt to describe succinctly the true secrets of democratic success.

B. DISSIDENT TEXTS AND THEIR DEMOCRATIC CONTEXTS

We face a conundrum: Ps.-Xenophon seemingly inaugurates a distinguished tradition of political criticism, yet his text is aporetic, stylistically confused, and generically sterile.¹⁹ There are various ways to explain the combination of strong ideas and weak literary vehicle, centering on author, genre, and context. One could imagine the rhetorician Isocrates suggesting, in a quasi-biographical mode, that the Old Oligarch was passionate and intelligent, but lacked the rhetorical training and practice that would allow him to express his feelings and ideas with clarity and force. Yet the biographical approach is obviously absurd in the case of an anonymously authored text. Designing fictionalized lives for the authors of classical texts pleased Hellenistic and Byzantine literary critics, but it is ill suited to modern intellectual history.²⁰ Though biographical details can help us to understand some aspects of some ancient texts, individual biography remains an explanatory tool of limited value.

Alternatively, one might imagine Aristotle proposing a biological metaphor, leading us to view this text as an early stage in the generic development of what would eventually find its telos in the philosophical monographs on political matters produced in the Lyceum. The history of genres can indeed offer real insight into the relationships between classical texts, and it need not necessarily resort to biological analogies and teleological assumptions to do so. But focusing primarily on genre tends to lead the analysis into a consideration of the ontological status of literature as such—which is foreign to the purposes of intellectual history as I understand it. Moreover, the history of genres is most useful in

¹⁹ Sense underlying the chaotic style: Bechlte, “Note,” 566 (quoted above, 1.n.16). Parts of section 1.B are adapted from Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 142–56.

²⁰ On the Hellenistic taste for fictionalized “lives” of literary figures, see Lefkowitz, *Lives*.

juxtaposing fairly large corpora that are relatively generically homogeneous, for example, Platonic dialogue with tragedy, comedy, or Isocratean epideictic rhetoric.²¹ The Athenian critical tradition with which we are concerned includes a number of texts that are generically peculiar and difficult to categorize (Ps.-Xenophon, Thucydides, Ps.-Aristotle). The intellectual historian seeking to come to grips with the multifaceted project of political dissent in democratic Athens cannot be content with looking at any one genre in relationship with several others. Such an approach necessarily makes the chosen genre the center of the analysis. This is a reasonable and potentially productive strategy for a scholar seeking (for example) to come to a better understanding of Platonic dialogue *per se*. But the sort of contextual intellectual history I am attempting here must avoid the undeniable temptation to approach the history of Athenian political thought as a variant on the theme of “Plato and His Contemporaries.”²²

B.1. Critical versus Democratic Discourse

A centrally important vector that can fruitfully be brought to bear on each of the texts constituting the Athenian critical literary tradition is the distinctive political culture—institutions, norms of public language, and patterns of social behavior—that developed in fifth- and fourth-century Athens as a consequence of democracy. A major burden of this book will be to show that when reading any classical Athenian text critical of popular rule, much can be gained from an appreciation of the democratic political culture in which the author lived and to which he attempted to respond. In brief, I will argue that literature critical of democracy developed as part of a complex and ongoing dialogue between elite literary and intellectual discourse on the one hand, and the democratic discourse that dominated the citizen Assembly, the people’s courts, and the public square (*agora*) of Athens on the other. Thus, while the critic’s primary intended audience might be his fellow elites (below, 1.C.1), among his implied interlocutors and the targets of his criticism were the logic and language of democracy itself.

If the basic notion that elite Athenian writers on political topics had the *demos* in mind, even when addressing their fellow intellectuals, is quite simple,²³ in practice Athenian writers found it difficult to develop a critical language and the generic forms that would allow them to engage in dialogue with democratic discourse on an equal footing. From the fifth century through the late fourth century, democratic political culture remained strong and remarkably pervasive within Athenian society. Because democracy offered to a wide franchise the desirable condition of “not being under another,” and because that condition — once revealed as possible—proved to be extraordinarily productive of institu-

²¹ For an example of what can be done in this line, see Nightingale, *Genres*.

²² This approach has a distinguished twentieth-century ancestry; see, for example, Field, *Plato and His Contemporaries*; Barker, *Greek Political Theory*; Gouldner, *Enter Plato*. The gravitational force exerted by Plato is clear to anyone working on intellectual problems of the fourth century B.C.; the reader may note that the chapter on Plato is by far the longest in this book.

²³ See, for example, Lloyd, “Democracy, Philosophy.”

tional structures and discourse for explaining and defending itself, democracy tended to monopolize both political practice and the very language of Athenian politics. As a result, though many elite Athenians felt that they intuitively “knew” that there was something “wrong” with democracy, it was not an easy task to conceptualize or to express a sustained, reasoned antidemocratic argument.

The awkward character of Ps.-Xenophon’s text may, therefore, be explained contextually in terms of its only partially successful struggle to develop an adequate array of robust alternative definitions for political abstractions and a literary structure capable of standing up to the democratic context. Despite the descriptive power of his central argument about demotic self-interest, Ps.-Xenophon’s political vocabulary remained uncomfortably suspended between the values of the traditional aristocrat and those of the new democracy. His guiding belief, that “better men would make better government if given a chance,” was, moreover, discredited by subsequent historical events. Yet although Ps.-Xenophon has no obvious generic heirs, by focusing on demotic self-interest and the democratic capacity to absorb and coopt its potential internal opponents, he identified a problem that would continue to exercise political dissidents for the next century.

The story of how a handful of elite Athenian writers responded to democratic ideology and practice and sought solutions (practical and imaginative) to “Ps.-Xenophon’s aporia” bears on the wider history of political thought. I focus on the critical force of works by Thucydides, Plato, et alii, not primarily as aristocratic whining, oligarchic polemic, or an impartial account of objective phenomena, but as resistance to a democratic regime of social power and public discourse. That regime had exposed the possibility of a human condition (freedom for the many) so profoundly desirable that it threatened to overwhelm all competing values. Reading Greek political philosophy as dissent suggests that Western political theory emerged from a lively debate over moral and ethical values, and over what should count as “political knowledge.”²⁴ And that debate was occasioned by the *success*, not the failure, of democracy.

In late-fifth- and fourth-century Athens, *dēmokratia* meant “the political power of the ordinary people.” If power includes control over the development and deployment of systems of meaning (including popular ideology and the rhetoric of public communication), then, for Athenians, criticism of the discourse of democratic government and of the assumptions of popular ideology could be a means of resisting political power.²⁵ It is highly probable that critics of the status

²⁴ Cf. Arendt, *Human Condition*, 12: “our” tradition of political thought “grew out of a specific historical constellation” –the trial of Socrates and the “conflict between the philosopher and the polis.” My argument here may be seen as a corollary to that developed by Lloyd *Magic, Reason*, 79–102, 240–67; *Revolutions of Wisdom*, 78–83; “Democracy, Philosophy”) that the Greek interest in reasoned argument arose at least in part from the political life of the Greek polis as manifested, most clearly, in experience of debate in the democratic citizen Assembly and legal hearings.

²⁵ The texts I address here (with the exception of Ps.-Xenophon) were completed after the end of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.). Euben (*Tragedy of Political Theory*) argues that the relationship between democracy and “political” texts was quite different during the floruit of Attic

quo existed at every level of Athenian society; it is not hard to imagine that in each village and neighborhood of the polis there were men and women who could be counted on to interrogate, humorously or angrily, various aspects of the current order of things. The voices of these “local critics” would surely tell us much about ancient democracy, but they are now lost. Scattered literary evidence exists for what we might call “quotidian oligarchic” revulsion for democracy. This tendency is summed up by the oath that Aristotle (*Pol.* 1310a9–10) reports was sworn by oligarchs in some Greek poleis: “I will be evilly disposed toward the demos, and will contrive against it whatever ill I can.”²⁶

The “background noise” generated by oligarchic sympathizers (who defined themselves specifically in contradistinction to the demos) constitutes a significant part of the Athenian political context, but such jejune complaints are unenlightening, in and of themselves, from the perspective of the history of Greek political discourse. On the other hand, a number of dissident Athenian intellectuals committed pungent and profoundly critical opinions to writing, and some of their texts have survived. Studying classical Athenian literature critical of the democratic regime offers access to one important fragment of what was certainly a much more diverse and widespread resistance to demotic political power. We may regret the loss of forms of local dissent that have failed to leave significant literary traces. But, as Ronald Syme once wrote, “One uses what one has, and there is work to be done.”²⁷ If we hope to gain even a partial understanding of the link between Athenian democratic politics and unease with how the people’s political power was manifested and deployed, we must first grapple with the texts we have.

In a seminal article of 1953, A.H.M. Jones pointed out two key issues facing the modern historian sympathetic to democracy who seeks to understand ancient political criticism.²⁸ First, although we have a good many classical texts in various genres that are highly critical of democracy, we have no surviving texts written with the explicit intention of explaining to a reader the principles on which Athenian democracy was predicated. Second, in the absence of formal defenses of democracy, understanding the “positive” argument an Athenian would make for democracy depends on a close reading of Athenian public rhetoric. While I have been deeply influenced by Jones’ fundamental insights, I find his approach

tragedy in the fifth century. But the similarity of arguments made by Ps.-Xenophon and by fourth-century authors suggests that, tragedy aside, there was some conceptual continuity between prewar and postwar critical literature.

²⁶ “Quotidian oligarchic” objections to democracy: Euripides *Suppliants* 399–441 (speech of the Theban herald); Herodotus 3.81 (defense of aristocracy [which is, in fact, little more than an attack on democracy] in the “Constitutional Debate”); Isocrates 7.15 (see below, 5.A); *XenHell.* 2.3.15–56 (debate between Theramenes and Critias, with Gray, *Character*, 94–99, 183–84); the grave monument of Critias (DK 88 A 13: personified *Oligarchia* setting fire to *Dēmokratia*); Theophr. *Char.* 26 (“Oligarchic Man”: below, 7.C).

²⁷ *Journal of Roman Studies* 58 (1969): 146, cited by T. P. Wiseman in his Syme Memorial Lecture (Victoria University of Wellington, 1996).

²⁸ Jones, *Athenian Democracy*, 41–72, originally published in *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11 (1953): 1–26.

to “criticizing and defending democracy” problematic. Jones argued that Athenian democracy was stable because it was dominated by “bourgeois” or “middle-class” citizens.²⁹ I view *dēmokratia* rather as a dynamic system through which the mass of ordinary citizens (*hoi polloi*, *to plēthos*, *hoi penētes*, etc.) (a) maintained personal dignity and political equality; (b) restrained the privileges and power of elites (*hoi oligoi*, *hoi chrēstoi*, *hoi plousioi*, etc.); and (c) thereby protected themselves from certain forms of socioeconomic exploitation and political dependency.

Furthermore, Jones saw the debate over ancient democracy in modernizing, liberal terms—for him, democracy was criticized and should be defended on the grounds of whether it allowed for rational decision-making about issues of state policy and whether it provided a secure environment in which civil society could flourish and in which private goods (especially material prosperity) could be enjoyed by individuals. Jones argued persuasively that democratic equality and freedom neither led necessarily to poor policy nor threatened civil society, and, thus, that the ancient critics were wrong to cast aspersions upon the democratic government. But classical Athenian political life cannot adequately be explained by a model of political behavior that assumes either a neat subdivision of the political realm into discrete categories of state, citizenry, and government, or a hierarchical differentiation between the (primary) private and (secondary) public spheres.³⁰ The Athenian did not engage in political activity solely as a functional means to gain the end of guarding against threats to his property or to his private pursuit of happiness. Rather, the values of equality and freedom that he gained by the possession and exercise of citizenship were substantive and central to his identity, and they provided a measure of meaning for his life.³¹ Once again, it is clear that in order to understand the critics of democracy, we need to look more closely at the wider ideological context.

The primacy of context is a point of convergence for several analytic traditions that influenced the shape of this book. The so-called Cambridge School of intellectual history focuses on how political terminology is used and revised by writers in arguments with their literary predecessors and contemporaries. As Quentin Skinner, Paul Cartledge, and other Cambridge intellectual historians have pointed out, even the most original writers appropriate preexisting vocabulary for discussing problems, but they often deploy that vocabulary in self-consciously innovative ways. In some periods (e.g., the eighteenth century A.D. and the fifth century B.C.), the ways in which terms are used in arguments change very rapidly. But even a text produced during a revolution can and should be situated, for analytical purposes, in its own proximate context. Political writing becomes historically meaningful when read against the backdrop of terms, assumptions, and ideas hammered out in earlier and contemporary discussions. That backdrop is typically best illuminated by the writings of lesser (because less innovative and

²⁹ See Markle, “Jury Pay,” for a detailed criticism.

³⁰ See further Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 161–87; and below, 3.C.1.

³¹ On identity, see, for example, Taylor, *Sources*; Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*; Manville, *Origins of Citizenship*.

original) intellectual lights.³² A “Cambridge School” reading of Athenian political texts requires a reconstruction of the fifth/fourth-century intellectual context, that is, the conceptual apparatus available for modification by the authors of our surviving texts. This sort of contextualist approach to political thought is not entirely foreign to classical scholarship; something like it is, for example, employed by the “Begriffsgeschichte School” of Christian Meier.³³ But an approach that presupposes that the context for surviving texts was defined primarily by *elite literary* discourse cannot fully explain Athenian political texts because it necessarily slights the formative role played by the Athenian demos and by democratic public practices and discourse.³⁴

An exclusive emphasis on the elite literary context as such (or, alternatively, on discovering instances of direct “intertextuality” between surviving tracts) will make it difficult for historians to link ideas with events. It may lead them to fall into the habit of supposing that more or less fully worked-out political theories must precede political practices. In the Athenian case, democratic practices were established well *before* any (surviving) text discussed democracy in abstract terms. An exclusively “climate of intellectual opinion” approach is especially problematic in the Athenian case because, as Jones pointed out, we have a number of important classical texts critical of democracy but no formal theory of democracy. If we accept that in order to comprehend how political vocabulary was employed in classical Athens, we must read our surviving political texts contextually, as interventions in an ongoing debate about politics, the question necessarily arises: Was there another side to the dialogue? If Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle can be characterized as critics of democracy, with whom were they arguing—other than with each other? The relative absence of formal democratic theory in the text record has led to inventive efforts (notably by Eric A. Havelock and Cynthia Farrar) to find democratic ideas lurking in extant elite texts.³⁵ Yet the hunt for formal Athenian democratic theory is ultimately chimerical, because in Athens, democratic theory neither attained nor required independent textual existence as such. The “theory of democracy” remained part of democratic public discourse and embedded in political rhetoric.³⁶ The elite authors of critical politi-

³² See Skinner et al., *Meaning and Context*; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment* and “Concept of a Language”; Cartledge, “Comparatively Equal.” The deconstructionist attack on Skinner’s contextualist approach offered by Harlan, “Intellectual History,” is predicated on an impoverished conception of speech-act theory as limited to oral communication; contrast Petrey, *Speech Acts*.

³³ Cf. Meier, *Introduction*, esp. 27–28, 35, focusing on the revolution of the conceptual universe in the fifth century B.C. and the comparison with the Enlightenment of ca. 1750–1850. Meier, *Discovery*, and Raaflaub, *Entdeckung der Freiheit*, are good examples of the genre.

³⁴ Cf. Dunn, “Transcultural Significance”; Skinner, “Language and Political Change,” esp. 22, on the ways in which “social vocabulary and social practice . . . prop each other up.”

³⁵ Havelock, *Liberal Temper*; Farrar, *Origins*. Despite my critical comments in Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 123–32, I am in full agreement with Farrar’s general argument that it was democratic experience and the concerns peculiar to democracy which informed fifth-century reflections on politics. Cf., similarly, Raaflaub, “Democracy, Oligarchy,” esp. 517–18, 525–26.

³⁶ See, for example, Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 86–106.

cal texts were, therefore, responding not only to one another, but also to the tenets of democratic popular ideology as expressed in public speech.

We must certainly investigate the internal workings of the “critical community” in democratic Athens (below, 1.C). But in order to understand the original force of Athenian political literature, we must also explore the linkages between written elite discourse and the public discourse of the democratic polis. This requires paying attention to the production of what counted as knowledge and the play of social and political power, a mode of analysis developed by Michel Foucault.³⁷ The idea that texts can fruitfully be read as products of complex matrices of social relations, which are in turn formed through the play of power, helps to define the relationship between Athenian political texts and the modes of discourse and the social practices typical of Athenian political society. In short, the historian cannot hope to understand Athenian political texts outside of the context of their production, nor can he or she grasp the context without a prior analysis of late-fifth- and fourth-century Athenian social practices, political ideology, and public speech.

B.2. Democratic Knowledge

In *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*, I argued that Athenian political ideology and significant aspects of Athenian social practice were formulated through, maintained by, and revealed in the processes of public speech. Because Assembly and lawcourt debates were particularly important forums, a careful reading of Athenian symbouleutic (Assembly) and dicanic (lawcourt) rhetoric allows us to reconstitute in some detail the tenets of the popular political ideology of the late fifth and fourth centuries B.C. In brief summary, among the central holdings of that ideology were:

1. A belief in the autochthonous nature of the Athenians, their innate intellectual superiority vis-à-vis all other peoples, and the necessity of maintaining the exclusivity of the citizenry;
2. An assumption that the ideal of political equality could be achieved and maintained in the face of existing social and intellectual inequalities among citizens;
3. A conviction that both consensus and freedom of public speech were desirable;
4. A belief in the superior wisdom of decisions made collectively by large bodies of citizens;
5. A presumption that elite citizens were simultaneously a danger to democracy and indispensable to the political decision-making process.

³⁷ See especially Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; *History of Sexuality*, vol. 1; and the essays collected in *Power/Knowledge*. It is worth noting that in his own late work on Greek society (*History of Sexuality*, vols. 2 and 3), which focuses on how prescriptive philosophical and medical texts “problematized” sexuality, Foucault made what E. Said (“Michel Foucault,” 8) has called a “particular and overdetermined shift from the political to the personal.” And yet, the personal and political cannot be fully segregated. As Miller (*Passion*, 359 with n. 15) points out, Foucault closed his last seminar in Berkeley (in fall 1983) by pointing out that Socrates and his successors represented “the roots of what we call the ‘critical’ tradition in the West.” See, further, Nehamas *Art of Living*.

The general acceptance by most Athenians of these premises allowed democratic Athens to work in practice as a state and as a society. Democratic ideology mediated between the reality of social inequality and the goal of political equality, and thereby arbitrated class tensions that elsewhere in Greece led to protracted and destructive civil wars. It provided a role for elite leadership within a political system based on frequent, public expressions of the collective will. But it also required elite leaders to remain closely attuned to popular concerns and prevented the formation of a cohesive ruling elite within the citizen body. In sum, it preserved the essential condition of “not being under another” for the members of the citizen body.

In democratic Athens there was no very meaningful separation between the realms of politics, political society (citizenry), and government. In the Athenian democracy, major government decision-making (by council, Assembly, law-courts, and boards of *nomothetai*, or “lawgivers”) was legitimate specifically because it *was* political. And thus there was no meaningful separation between supposedly objective and scientific truths of the sort used (so we are told) by modern political rulers when making “serious” decisions, and the subjective political truths of the sort modern politicians find it expedient to present to the citizenry during elections and occasional plebiscites. In Athens, the general understanding held by the citizenry regarding the nature of society was the same understanding employed by decision-making bodies in formulating government policy for deployment in the real world. For most Athenians, the shocking “postmodern” conclusion that “all knowledge is political” (i.e., implicated in relations of power) was simply a truism; neither the possibility nor the normative desirability of genuinely apolitical forms of knowledge about society or its members ever entered the ordinary Athenian’s head.³⁸

In the decades after the Peloponnesian War, this relationship between ideology and political power provided the grounds for a remarkably stable sociopolitical order. Athenian democracy was not founded on a formal constitution or on a set of metaphysical/ontological/epistemological certainties, but rather was undergirded by a socially and politically constructed “regime of truth” (i.e., an integrated set of assumptions about what is regarded as right, proper, and true). Among its central tenets was the recognition that freedom for and rule by the many was a practical possibility.³⁹ I propose calling the Athenian truth regime “democratic knowl-

³⁸ Definition of postmodern: Hoy, “Foucault: Modern or Postmodern.” The modern horror at the politicization of knowledge is still best captured in Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-four*; note that in Orwell’s dystopia there remains a distinction between ideology ($2 + 2 = 5$) and brute reality ($2 + 2 = 4$), a distinction that is recognized by the rulers of society. Barber (*Strong Democracy*, 46–66) offers a vigorous critique of attempts to base politics in “prepolitical” forms of knowledge and (129–31) defines “strong democracy” as the *absence* of an independent (nonpolitical) ground for decision or action. Similar arguments had previously been made by John Dewey, who tended to valorize wisdom, meaning, and experience over “truth”; see Editors’ Introduction to Dewey *Political Writings*, xv–xvi.

³⁹ Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 131: “Each society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is

edge.” The emergence and practical functioning of democratic knowledge depended on the implicit willingness of most citizens to accept the political verities they lived by as “performative” (by which I mean that political and social “truths” were brought into being by felicitously performed speech acts) rather than as absolutes denoted by a transcendent natural or divine order. The authority of the *demos* was legitimated neither by “divine right” nor by “natural right”—which distinguishes it from the dominant early modern and Enlightenment European explanations of sovereignty. The ordinary people of Athens were free, politically equal, and secure (as a body of citizens and as individuals), because, by their own actions, they had come to realize that they could be so, and because they were willing, in word and deed, to defend these pragmatic conditions of existence against internal and external threats.

The Athenian political order was grounded in this democratic knowledge. And democratic knowledge was predicated, in the language of J. L. Austin’s speech-act theory, on the “conventional effect of a conventional procedure” rather than on an objective, metaphysical, or “natural” view of social reality; it was created and recreated through collective practices of public communication, rather than being given by an external authority or discovered through intellectual effort. In the terminology of semiotics, democratic knowledge did not need to suppose that signifiers attached directly, permanently, or naturally to referents, only that signifiers pointed to commonly accepted codes and socially constituted meanings. This democratic and (in modern philosophical terms) pragmatic position allowed the Athenians to avoid the epistemological traps (and the political ugliness they can entail) of value-free relativism on the one hand, and positivist absolutism on the other.

Athenian political culture was specifically based on collective opinion, rather than on objectively verifiable, scientific truths. By this I do not mean that the Athenians supposed that their collective opinion could cause the sun to rise in the west, or alter other “brute” physical facts. But social facts were regarded by them as conventional and political, rather than homologous to the brute facts of nature.⁴⁰ The official formula of legislative enactment in the Athenian Assembly, *edoxe tōi dēmōi*—“it appeared right to the citizenry” that such and such should be the case—defines the democratic approach to the relationship between social knowledge, decision, and action. A politics based on “what seems right,” on common opinion, can be built from the bottom up, and potentially allows for the integration of “local knowledges” (e.g., the specific practices of village, cult, or family life) within the broader community of the polity. As a result of the complex structure of Athenian political institutions, there was a constant give-and-take between center and periphery, between specific local understandings, local critics, and the generalized polis-wide democratic ideology.⁴¹ This “system” (keeping in

sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.” Cf. Said, “Michel Foucault,” 5–6.

⁴⁰ Brute versus social facts: Searle, *Speech Acts*, 50–53, with comments of Petrey, *Speech Acts*, 59–69.

⁴¹ Local knowledge (as a possible source of criticism and resistance): Foucault, *Power/Knowl-*

mind that it was not designed by any single authority, nor entirely rational in its workings) integrated Athenian processes of discussion and decision into a public way of knowing about society that was simultaneously a way of being a citizen, doing politics, and making policy.

The Athenian sociopolitical order was relatively stable because of the integrative tendencies and deep-rootedness of popular ideology. Ideological equilibrium allowed the Athenians the luxury of a degree of epistemic continuity adequate to provide a basis for collective decision-making—Assemblymen and jurors employed as the premises of their deliberations opinions that were generally accepted as valid by the citizenry as a whole. Yet in practice the democracy was flexible, dialectical, and revisable. The frequent meetings of the Assembly and people's courts allowed (even required) contrasting, critical views to be aired publicly, and this process in turn periodically forced public meanings (the assumptions used in decision-making) to change in response to changing external circumstances. Thus democratic knowledge evolved over time (sometimes very rapidly) without precipitating a political revolution. Meanwhile, democratic ideology and institutional procedure allowed for practical decisiveness: reasonably intelligent, binding (although open to legal challenge at the initiative of any individual citizen) decisions on internal matters and foreign policy were made in the Assembly by the Athenian demos in the absence of ruling elites, genuine consensus, or complete and objectively verifiable scientific knowledge about details of political affairs.⁴²

B.3. J. L. Austin and Performative Political Speech

The complex relationships between democratic knowledge, social practice, and critical political writing are, I believe, clarified by Austinian speech-act theory. In *How to Do Things with Words*, J. L. Austin argued that speech is not only descriptive, but performative. To the linguistic categories of locution (speech itself) and perlocution (the effect of speech on an audience), Austin added “illocution” —the intended force of speech that enables speakers to do things in the world. Austin showed that in ordinary spoken language, description and enactment are not easily separated. The constative role of speech (to state what is so) is in practice inseparable from and a product of speech's illocutionary, performative function (to make something happen). If description is a subcategory of performance, then the production of meaning and “truth” is a social process, accomplished by “felicitous” speech performances that are necessarily carried out within the context of accepted social and linguistic conventions. Sandy Petrey, who extends Austinian theory to literature, points out that these conventions are revisable: to the degree that they are politically determined, conventions can be

edge, 80–85; cf. Foucault, “Is It Useless?” Complexity of the “grammar” of Athenian institutions: Hansen, *Was Athens a Democracy?*

⁴² The sheer volume of political business done in this manner is overwhelming. Hansen (*Athenian Democracy*, 156) suggests that some 30,000 decrees of the Assembly were passed in the period 403–322.

contested, or even overthrown by revolutionary action. But once again, even in the midst of a revolution, people do communicate. For speech (written or spoken) to act, for human communication to be possible, conventions of some sort must pertain.⁴³ Returning to Athens, we can now see how the citizens enacted social, legal, and political realities when they voted in the Assembly and lawcourts: that which *edoxe tōi dēmōi* was constituted as true, for all social and political intents and purposes, through felicitously performed acts of collective decision and proclamation. When the Assembly votes for war with Sparta, a state of war is caused to come into existence by the Assembly's proclamation; when the jury votes that Socrates is guilty, he is constituted a guilty man.

In Austinian speech-act theory, as in Cambridge School intellectual history (which, in the work of Quentin Skinner, draws heavily and explicitly upon Austin's analysis of performative language), context takes center stage. The successful performance of a speech act depends on existing social, political, and linguistic protocols: a courting couple would not be made man and wife by a child's proclamation that they were so; a judge's statement does things that a child's does not do because it is performed within the context of a set of conventions that are accepted as valid by the participants.⁴⁴ In everyday social practice, the felicity of the speech act is demonstrated by perlocutionary effects: the subsequent behavior of the relevant members of society. If, after the ceremony, our hypothetical couple acts like a married couple and is treated as a married couple by their society, we may say that the act of the judge who said "I pronounce you man and wife" was felicitous. And likewise in the case of a declaration of war by the Athenian Assembly or the conviction of Socrates. Thus the felicity of an illocutionary speech act is context-dependent and socio-politically determined.

But what of the situation in which a speech act is treated as being felicitous within a local subcommunity, and as being infelicitous in the larger community, for example, in the case of a modern American homosexual couple who enact a marriage ceremony?⁴⁵ This potential conflict between "local" and "national"

⁴³ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*. Exactly how speech-act theory deals with reference has been the subject of an ongoing debate, notably between J. Derrida (*Limited Inc.*) and J. Searle (*Speech Acts* and "Reiterating the Differences"), both of whom owe much to Austin's work and criticize certain aspects of it. The approach I advocate here is close to the reconfiguration of Austin's theory, with special reference to the analysis of literature, developed by Petrey (*Realism and Revolution and Speech Acts*). Petrey emphasizes the breakdown of the distinction between constative and performative. But he also acknowledges the force of Derrida's criticism of conceptualizing literary speech as "parasitic" and points out that Austin tended to underestimate the role of politics in the construction of the conventions that permit speech acts to perform felicitously. Like Petrey, I suppose that these weaknesses can be corrected within the terms of the original theory and do not limit its usefulness for understanding political literature.

⁴⁴ This is explained by Austin's Rules A.1 and A.2 (*How to Do Things with Words*, 13–14, 26–35). A.1: [In order for a speech act to be felicitously performed,] "there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances." A.2: "The particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked."

⁴⁵ I owe this important point and the hypothetical example to Charles Hedrick.

spheres was not discussed by Austin, but it is important for the historical analysis of critical political discourse as resistance. The act of performing a speech act that the speaker knows will be regarded as infelicitous within the larger community can be read as an intentional act of resistance.⁴⁶ The act brings the conventions valid within the local community into overt conflict with the conventions of the larger society and thus exposes the partial and socially constructed nature of the broader context. This exposure is dangerous (and thus meaningful as an act of resistance) because it challenges the tendency of the larger society to equate convention with human nature (in Greek terms, *nomos* with *phusis*), to see contingent social facts as unquestionable brute facts. Likewise, the promulgation (in oral speech or written text) of a system of knowing about society that a speaker or writer recognizes will not be accepted as valid by most within his community can be read as resistance to the dominant system of power and knowledge.⁴⁷

Applying Austin to politics (something the philosopher himself, it is fair to say, seems not to have envisioned) leads to an emphasis on political power as control of the means of symbolic production. It points to rhetoric as a form of political action, and to criticism of established and generally accepted discursive contexts as a central project of political theorizing: Those in power will typically seek to create and maintain a stable context in which rhetorical statements by those designated as appropriate speakers will act in predictable ways. And they may go one step further, in suggesting that the prevailing discursive dispensation is in some strong sense "natural," or even "inevitable." Theorizing the relationship between context and felicitous speech (i.e., discussing and analyzing the relationship critically) points to the historical specificity and contingency of every context—including the discursive context in which the critical utterance or text is produced. Demonstrating that discursive context is a contingent artifact of specific historical and social conditions in turn opens up the imaginative possibility of major revisions in the social conditions governing performative speech. And this means that under imaginable conditions, speech acts that are currently felicitous could be rendered infelicitous (and vice versa). It becomes possible to imagine conditions in which those whose speech currently has no political valence could do politically important things with words. And in this sense, critical political theory might be a genuinely revolutionary undertaking.

⁴⁶ Note that felicity here is clearly separate from the issue of "sincerity" and "comprehensibility." The two gay persons were sincere in their intention to be married. What they intended is more or less comprehensible to members of the wider community, but their act was nonetheless infelicitous in the context of the wider community because the actions of the members of that wider community demonstrate that the act did not constitute a new social reality.

⁴⁷ On the codependence of power and resistance, see Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 134–55. Foucault's view of resistance has often been regarded as inadequate in the face of his detailed treatment of power: see Walzer, "Politics of Foucault"; Smart, "Politics of Truth," esp. 169–71; Ferry and Renault, "Foucault"; with Ober *Athenian Revolution*, 154–55, and other literature cited.

B.4. *Why Democracy Begets Dissent*

The politicization of Austinian speech-act theory points to at least a weak causal relationship between the flourishing of democratic Athenian political culture and the contemporary flourishing of intellectual-literary culture.⁴⁸ It is well known that classical Athenian democracy *allowed* various forms of dissent—and this was rightly recognized at the time as an important and distinctive attribute of popular rule.⁴⁹ Yet two other factors are equally important. First, in most premodern and nondemocratic societies, those individuals who might have been the analogues of Athenian elite critics of popular rule—persons who possessed adequate leisure and education to enable them to engage in intellectual activities and literary production—tended to be members of (or coopted by) the ruling elite. In a democracy of the Athenian type, political authority is at least *potentially* discontinuous with economic power. The wealthy, educated elite of Athens did not constitute a ruling elite in any ordinary sense of the term and they recognized Athens as exceptional in this regard. Thus, in Athens, those possessing the means to criticize the political status quo also had the motivation to criticize the system that deprived them of the political privileges that they would expect to enjoy under traditional, nondemocratic forms of government. Next, Athenian democracy was as a form of government exceptionally strongly oriented toward public speech and formal rhetoric: witness the democratic practices of frequent public meetings, open debate, mass voting on policy, and publication (often in publicly displayed epigraphic form) of political proceedings.⁵⁰ The hypertrophy of public verbiage (the obvious contrast is “laconic” Sparta) tended to focus the attention of critics on the peculiarities of democratic rhetoric and on the contextual factors that allowed the speech acts of the demos to achieve felicity.

In *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*, I attempted to define the conventions whereby the debates and proclamations performed in Assembly and courtroom could and did “do things” within Athenian society. In terms of understanding the relationships of power between elites and masses of ordinary citizens, it is important to decide whether those conventions were actually the product of demotic discourse. Was what I have described here as “democratic knowledge”

⁴⁸ This issue of the relationship between Athenian politics and literary flourishing is, of course, a big one, and no single cause should be assumed: a fuller analysis of the phenomenon would have to look at Athenian demography (Athens as an aberrant super-polis), the Athenian empire (and the revenues it produced), patterns of Aegean trade, and many other factors.

⁴⁹ Democracy allows dissent: Demosthenes (20.105–8) famously pointed out that one might freely praise Sparta in Athens but not Athens in Sparta. See further, 7.n.36.

⁵⁰ On the huge number of inscriptions generated by democratic Athens in comparison with the predemocratic polis and with other poleis, see Hedrick, “Writing, Reading”; and Meyer, “Epitaphs and Citizenship.” Steiner (*Tyrant's Writ*, 239–41) suggests some of the complexities of regarding the “epigraphic habit” as simply democratic, adducing the role of imperialism and the example of the grand inscribed memorials of ancient Near Eastern despots. But if the archaeological record is to be trusted, the greatest flourish of Athenian epigraphy was not the imperial fifth century, but the postimperial fourth century, suggesting that the relationship between writing and imperial achievement at Athens is indirect.

simply a form of popular false consciousness or mystification that enabled an elite to control and exploit the lower classes of citizens?⁵¹ I argue quite to the contrary, that the sociopolitical conventions dominant in late-fifth- and fourth-century Athens were the product of a historical development whereby “the many,” by their own actions, revealed the possibility of the extension of freedom qua “not being under another” to a broad (although hardly universal) franchise. They defined that franchise as *Demos* (with a capital *D*) and named the Athenian political order designed to defend it *dēmokratia*.⁵² As a result, “the many” gained control of the public language employed in political deliberations, and so the primary context for felicitous speech performance in Athens was defined by popular, not elite, ideology.

The attraction of democratic freedom (in association with political equality and security) was such that it appeared capable of replacing, or at least fundamentally reordering, all preexisting moral, ethical, and political values. It is in this special and historically distinctive sense that democratic knowledge and demotic social conventions sought to extend a form of rhetorical and even epistemological hegemony over all members of Athenian citizen society, including the elites. By this I mean that many key terms (for citizen, justice, freedom, equality, and so on) within Athenian political terminology became so strongly marked by their use in democratic contexts that it required great effort for dissidents to redefine them for use in nondemocratic discourse. As Ps.-Xenophon’s text reveals, there was a tendency for the democratic marking of the terminology of politics to confuse and subvert the claims of opponents of democracy who sought to explain the nature of the people’s rule.

This hegemony of popular ideology and public discourse was, in a sense, the basis of Athens’ political order. Athens was a democracy, not just because the ordinary citizen had a vote, but because he was a participant in maintaining a political culture and a value system that constituted him a free agent and the political equal of his elite neighbor. Through publicly performed speech acts, democratic institutions were implicated in an ongoing process of defining and redefining the contingent truths used in political decision-making and of assimilating local knowledges into an overarching democratic knowledge. It was this process and this overarching knowledge that the most profound of the elite Athenian critics sought to expose as problematic. Their best efforts were *provoked* by the hegemonic tendencies of democratic political culture just as those efforts were *made possible* by its highly porous nature.⁵³ And thus, rather than

⁵¹ Cf. Eagleton, *Ideology*, 29–30, “ideology” types four and five.

⁵² For “capital-*D*” *Demos*, as the whole of the “imagined” citizenry, see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 117–20.

⁵³ Evidence for democratic discursive “hegemony” includes private nomenclature (the high incidence of *Demo*- and *-demos* compounds, often in association with traditional aristocratic terminology: *Aristo*-, *Chari*-, *-sthenes*, etc.), the demotic appropriation of aristocratic vocabulary (see Ober, *Mass*, 289–92), and the elite concern with democratic “indoctrination” that is especially evident in Plato’s *Gorgias* and *Republic* (below, 4.C–D). Tocqueville (*Democracy in America*, 9) offers a definition for what I am calling democratic hegemony, noting that the influence of equality “extends far beyond political mores and laws, exercising dominion over civil society as much as over the government; it creates opinions, gives birth to feelings, suggests customs, and modifies whatever it

frustrating genius and instantiating conformity and mediocrity, as modern critics of democratic egalitarianism have often alleged, democracy was the prior and necessary condition both for the development of deliberative discursive habits and for the formulation of a key intellectual problem. Those habits and attempts to solve that problem eventuated in the monumental texts on which the Western tradition of political theory was built.⁵⁴

C. THE COMPANY OF ATHENIAN CRITICS

As my reading of Ps.-Xenophon's text suggests, elite critical resistance to democracy was not an easy task. In the face of the revelation of democratic freedom, "the innate superiority of the few" and "the self-evident justice of their domination of the many" became woefully inadequate premises for political argument. For the prospective Athenian author of a text systematically critical of democratic culture (as opposed to the local critic of democratic practice), the issue was not how best to describe "what is functionally or instrumentally wrong with how this regime works." Rather, faced with the democratic tendency to monopolize and realign the terminology of politics, he confronted the more basic problems of recuperating a vocabulary and finding a literary structure capable of being adapted to the expression of his critical intuitions.⁵⁵ How to break free of the equation between democratic freedom and legitimate political rule? How to explain why a rational reader should not find Athens' political system, and the ethical values and social conditions it defended, any more attractive than does the writer? How to articulate an alternative politics that the reader could be persuaded to prefer and (perhaps) actively to support? The problem was, moreover, overwhelmingly more difficult after the ghastly regime of the Thirty had thoroughly discredited traditional conceptions of oligarchy as the rule of the naturally virtuous few.

Modern political theory might seem to suggest that the obvious starting point for the Athenian critic of democracy was the issue of sovereignty: "Who actually rules and in whose interest?" versus "Who *should* rule and in whose interest?" The latter was indeed the question posed by Ps.-Xenophon, and he was able to frame his answer in overtly moral terms: the elite, who are better people, should rule *because* they are better people. Accordingly, although oligarchs would rule in their own interests, an oligarchical government would be substantively better than

does not create." It is important to keep in mind, however, that even nondemocratic forms of cultural hegemony remain porous and provide spaces in which resistance may be manifested; see, e.g., LaCapra, *History and Criticism*, 58–65; Gunn, *Thinking*, 1; Eagleton, *Ideology*, 45–47.

⁵⁴ For a review of "democratic mediocrity" arguments (associated with, e.g., Hannah Arendt, Seymour Lipset, and Alan Bloom), see McClelland, *Crowd and Mob*, with review by Daniel Pick in *London Review of Books* (23 Nov. 1989): 20.

⁵⁵ It will be clear by now that I disagree with those writers (e.g., Loraux, *Invention*) who have argued that Athenian democracy itself was subverted by the continued power of aristocratic discourse; see Ober, *Mass*, 289–92.

democracy because the intrinsic moral standing of those governing was superior to that of the many. Ps.-Xenophon, however, enjoyed a luxury denied to his successors in the critical project: he wrote his text in an era that preceded a series of tragic events of the late fifth century B.C. that made this sort of simple moral-political argument impossible to sustain.

In 411 and again in 404 B.C., short-lived oligarchic governments—"the Four Hundred" and "the Thirty"—were established at Athens. In each case, the oligarchic leaders promised to tighten the criteria for citizenship in Athens so that the poorest Athenians would be disenfranchised, leaving several thousand of the "better people" to participate in a "hoplite republic." In practice, however, the leading oligarchs themselves in each case governed autocratically; political power was wielded arbitrarily by a tiny and self-serving junta. The unquestionable moral ugliness and sheer brutality of the second of these oligarchic interludes, especially in contrast to the relative benevolence of the restored democratic government, rendered the argument that "the aristocratic few should rule because they are morally superior to the many" untenable and stimulated late-fifth- and early-fourth-century critics of democracy to augment the old question of "Who should rule?" with new lines of approach.⁵⁶

In addition to complaining about particular institutional failings, Ps.-Xenophon's successors developed arguments linking politics with political and natural history, speculative psychology, epistemology, and metaphysical ontology. They explored in depth the political functions of speech, questioning the efficacy of public rhetoric as a prelude to decision-making, the validity of mass wisdom as a basis for judgment, and the felicity of the speech acts performed by public bodies. They challenged the accuracy of democratic knowledge and the justice of the deployment of power by the democratic political authority. Given the close interrelationship of knowledge, speech, and power in the democratic polis, an attack on democratic knowledge might undermine the demos' power (*kratos*), and an attack on the nature of or use of *kratos* by the demos might in turn destabilize democratic knowledge and its public, rhetorical instruments.

In order for the Athenian political dissident to offer an alternative to democratic knowledge and practice, he had first to identify, as a *point d'appui*, a complaint or concern that would be recognized by his intended readers (probably elite, but not necessarily antidemocratic) as legitimate. This might entail exploiting the audience's recognition of incongruities within the matrix of assumptions and values that constituted democratic knowledge (viz., the Socratic elenchus) or identifying contradictions between democratic ideals and state policy (e.g., Thucydides' account of Athenian imperial policy during the Peloponnesian War). Closely

⁵⁶ For a frontal assault on the notion that the few should be regarded as the demos' moral superiors in light of the crimes of the Thirty, see the speech given by Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.4.40–42) to the democratic leader Thrasybulus, with the comments of Forsdyke, "Exile," 303. On the endemic vagueness of the concept "oligarchy," even on the part of classical oligarchs, see Brock, "Athenian Oligarchs." The modern tendency to cast the question "Who should rule?" in the terms of "sovereignty" is an artifact of the political conditions of early modern Europe; see Ober *Athenian Revolution*, 120–22.

related to the effort to find a legitimate point of departure was the search for new literary genres adequate to the development of large-scale projects of political dissent. Finding a gap, or a “lack of fit,” in the edifice of democratic knowledge, and developing (or adapting) a literary genre as a wedge to exploit inconsistencies, were difficult but essential critical tasks given the democracy’s ideological tendency to obscure contradictions and in light of its close relationship to the existing genres of drama and public oratory. These considerations help to explain the remarkable generic diversity and intellectual originality of Athenian critical projects, which ranged in imaginative scope from the apparently chilly historical realism of Thucydides to the seemingly fantastic utopias sketched by Aristophanes and Plato.⁵⁷

C.1. A Competitive Community of Interpretation

Despite its stylistic clumsiness, Ps.-Xenophon’s short text is full of political ideas. The frequency with which these ideas appear in the works of later critics is especially striking given that Ps.-Xenophon’s successors worked on the other side of the great divide opened by the political events of 411–403 B.C. Among the pertinent insights sketched out by the Old Oligarch and pursued in more detail by his successors in the critical project are the following:

1. Democracy is not the rule of the demos qua citizenship in the interest of the entire polis, but the self-interested rule of a sociological faction.
2. The collectivization of political responsibility for decisions and agreements in a democracy leads to dishonesty and the tendency to scapegoat individual speakers or magistrates.
3. Because it is an integrated system, democracy seems incapable of internal amelioration, yet because of its inclusivist tendencies, especially in regard to citizenship, it coopts its natural enemies and so generates few active opponents.
4. There is a strong relationship between a democracy’s domestic and foreign policies; a rational imperial democracy will be likely to foment democracy among its subjects.
5. Democracy depends on naval power; naval power in turn depends on the control of capital resources; ergo a democracy will tend to be aggressively acquisitive.
6. Democracy’s core values of freedom and equality are not exclusive to the citizen population; noncitizens are also treated more equitably than is seemly.
7. Democracy tends to blur the distinction between nature and political culture, thereby blinding elites to their own best interests and luring them into immorality.

In sum, Ps.-Xenophon confronts his reader with a complex ethical problem, one that each classical Athenian critic of popular rule after him attempted to

⁵⁷ Drama and oratory: Ober and Strauss, “Drama.” By deliberately grouping a variety of texts under the general rubric “political dissent” in order to elucidate the intellectual connections among them, I have tended to deemphasize other possible categorical schemes, e.g., utopian versus realist, or “high” versus “low” utopianism. For alternatives, see Dawson, *Cities of the Gods*; Cartledge, “L’Utopie et la critique.”

answer: First, in light of democracy's apparent failings, should an "excellent person" choose to live under a democracy? And next, having chosen to live in Athens, how should that person conduct his life? Ps.-Xenophon, moreover, anticipates later critics in various authorial strategies. He assumes the mantle of an objective observer capable of grasping and arbitrating among different sides of complex issues; he makes a verbal display (*epedeixa*, 3.1) of his own special knowledge of current and historical political affairs; he takes a didactic role relative to an imagined reader. Many of the key terms in what would become a canonical "critical vocabulary" appear in Ps.-Xenophon's text. There are, to be sure, important intellectual issues common to many of the later critics to which Ps.-Xenophon does not allude, most notably, the tendency of democracy to confuse pronouncements (*logoi*) with material realities (*erga*). But in light of his stylistic clumsiness and the catastrophic historical invalidation of his central moral-political assumption, the Old Oligarch's apparent anticipation of ideas fully developed by later and greater thinkers demands explanation.

Although imagining the Western tradition of political theory as an extended commentary on a strange little tract written by a clumsy genius will serve as a useful conceit, Ps.-Xenophon was clearly reprocessing ideas already current in his mid-fifth-century cultural milieu.⁵⁸ Here I characterize that milieu (or one important part of it) as an informal "community of critical political discourse," a body of elite intellectuals centered in Athens and centrally concerned with commenting on Athenian political culture. The Athenian tradition of critical political literature long antedated Ps.-Xenophon. It may be thought of as originating with the early-sixth-century political poetry of Solon, who was sharply critical of wrongdoing on the part of greedy Athenian elites and overweening demos alike. Solon famously depicted himself as defending a middle ground against two hostile armies—the powerful few and the insurgent many. He argued that the flourishing of the polis depended upon restraining both parties, and his verses castigated both sides for overreaching.⁵⁹ Yet with the flourishing of democracy in the fifth century, demotic mass and political elite were subsumed in a single institutional and ideological system. By mid-century, the age of Ps.-Xenophon,

⁵⁸ Among earlier Greek writers whose ideas were available to Ps.-Xenophon and were reconfigured in the late fifth and fourth centuries are Solon (see next note), Pindar (esp. *Pythian* 2.86–88, on the three main types of government as monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy), Parmenides (on seeming and being), and the Older Sophists (esp. on *nomos* and *physis*; see Frisch, *Constitution*, 106–29). It is not my purpose to trace these earlier traditions in detail here; see, recently, Bleicken, "Entstehung"; Raaflaub, "Politisches Denken"; Raaflaub and Müller-Luckner, *Anfänge politischen Denkens*. The major texts are conveniently collected and translated in Gagarin and Woodruff, *Early Greek Political Thought*. Criticism of democracy certainly postdates 322 B.C. (see Roberts, *Athens on Trial*), but arguably changed its character once democracy no longer held a "hegemonic" cultural position and became associated instead with resistance to Macedonian or Roman rule. Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, remains useful as a single-author survey, but should now be augmented by Rowe and Schofield, *Cambridge History*.

⁵⁹ On Solon, and the context of his political poetry, see Martin, "Seven Sages"; Anhalt, *Solon the Singer*; and esp. Balot, "Genealogy of Greed," ch. 2, which develops in detail the two strands of Solonian political criticism and situates them in the context of the early-sixth-century Athenian social crisis and Solon's own legislation. Cf. below, 5.A.

Athenian political writers had meshed the two strands of Solonian criticism, and the critical community crystallized around a topic: intellectual dissent focused on democracy as a unitary system that benefited the many and coopted even its “natural” internal opponents among the elite few. The topic of “democracy as a problem” proved extremely fruitful; the community of critical intellectuals flourished until the overthrow of Athenian democracy (by force of Macedonian arms) in the late fourth century.

The fifth- and fourth-century Athenian critics of democracy drew freely upon Homeric epic, Solonian elegy, and other early Greek traditions of writing about ethics, knowledge, nature, and society. But they reworked earlier conceptions for the specifically political purposes of the contemporary critical project. This process is particularly clear in Thucydides’ appropriation of the nascent genre of historiography and in Plato’s remarkable decision, when writing the *Republic*, to discuss epistemology and metaphysics by constructing a model polis. The “democratic turn” in late fifth- and fourth-century Athenian critical literature offered a common ground for writers in diverse genres, and provided them with resources for challenging the authority of their literary predecessors. Evidence for the existence of the Athenian critical community per se is scattered, and it must for the most part be inferred from the works of Athenian political theorists themselves. Yet it is possible to sketch a hypothetical portrait of its operational characteristics, values, and membership.

The Athenian critical community posited in this book was not a true “face-to-face society” or Aristotelian *koinōnia*. It was a relatively small, informal, and elite body, defined in large part by writing and reading. Its members shared similar intellectual concerns, employed a specialized terminological and conceptual vocabulary to discuss a common set of problems, and built upon one another’s literary endeavors in seeking solutions. This “community” had a place (Athens), but spanned three human generations in time. Its membership was, for the most part, wealthy and, by definition, highly educated.⁶⁰ It had no organizational structure or set membership. But many Athenian social critics knew one another: some were masters and students, others will have entertained one another. Plato’s dialogues and Isocrates’ epideictic speeches offer glimpses of the community in action. Certain of its members met for discussion of political ideas (inter alia) in groups and in pairs, at the gymnasia and other public buildings of Athens, at shops, in private houses, in shady groves in the Attic countryside, and—by the early fourth century—in the schools established by prominent philosophers and rhetoricians.⁶¹ An idealizing model of these discussions is provided by Plato’s and

⁶⁰ Steiner (*Tyrant’s Writ*, 193) goes so far as to suggest that in Athens, “reading and writing” were not only pastimes, but “act within the sources as indications of a man’s disaffection with democracy”; cf. 186–241, esp. 221–26 (on the “bookish” associations of the oligarchic counterrevolutionaries of 411 and 404). Socrates, who wrote nothing and was not a wealthy man, is the rule-proving exception. Barber (*Strong Democracy*, 95–96) notes the “dispositional elitism” of most (written) political theory from antiquity to the present.

⁶¹ Where the elite meet: at gymnasia and public buildings (Plato *Euthphr.* 2a), in shops (below, 5.A), in private houses (below, 4.D), in groves (Plato *Phdr.*), in schools (below, 4.A, 5.A, 6.A).

Xenophon's descriptions of intellectual symposia, attended by poets, artists, self-styled philosophers, politicians, and other elite residents of Athens. Recent scholarship on the culture of the symposium has emphasized the private drinking party as constructing an alternative to the public space of the polis. Symposium space was neither fully private nor public; it allowed for the development and display of modes of discourse and social mores that were seemingly at odds with the dominant egalitarian ethos of polis culture. Yet the symposium also, and in important ways, reflects key values of the democratic polis: like the list of citizens, the guest list at any given symposium was at once diverse and exclusive; symposiasts treated one another as equals, and they reveled in their relative freedom from external constraints.⁶²

It is perfectly likely (if not demonstrable) that some of the authors discussed here met at actual symposia; but whether or not they were fellow symposiasts in fact, the general model of the symposium, with its connections to and self-conscious separation from the polis, provides a useful allegory for the critical community. That community was, however, larger and more diverse, chronologically and geographically, than any gathering of symposiasts. Its size and diversity were in large part a function of literacy. Because a number of Athenian political dissenters wrote texts, and because these texts eventually circulated outside the intimate circle of friends, students, and trusted comrades, the "Athenian critical community" was in a sense a "virtual community." It was not limited to those persons who might actually meet face-to-face.⁶³ Some of its members

⁶² Plato *Symp.*; Xen. *Symp.* Private space in the Greek polis: Jameson, "Private Space." Culture of the symposium as a "place apart" from the democratic polis, manifesting a "willingness to establish conventions fundamentally opposed to those within the polis as a whole": Murray, "Symptotic History," 7, and "Af fair of the Mysteries." Cf. Tocqueville *Democracy in America*, 178–79, on the aftermath of the crushing of all overt resistance by a "democratic party": the aristocrats go into hiding and "form within the state a private society with its own tastes and enjoyments"; the rich man gives lip service to the support for democracy and dresses simply; he greets the shoemaker on the street, but safe at home, "luxury is worshiped." Freedom and equality in Plato's *Symposium*: Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy*, 91–98. Cf. LaCapra, *History and Criticism*, 65: "High culture may itself harbor forces of resistance and criticism that are most effective socially when they connect with aspects of popular culture."

⁶³ A modern analogy might be sought in the contributors to a journal of political opinion. The journal *Dissent* was founded in 1954, in the immediate aftermath of the death of Stalin and the collapse of the "Old Left," to provide a forum for staunchly antityrannical democratic-socialist "New York intellectuals" (M. Cohen, "Introduction," 17–25); the term "New York intellectuals" as shorthand for anti-Stalinist American leftists was coined by Irving Howe, the journal's founder (ibid., 19). *Dissent* editor Michael Walzer's description (Preface to Mills, *Legacy of Dissent*, 15) of the journal's ideals might be rewritten without changing many words (new wording is in brackets) to describe the Athenian community of critics: "*Dissent* is a magazine [the critical community provided a readership] for people who know how to worry. Founded and sustained for forty [eighty] years by . . . writers with strong democratic-socialist [aristocratic] convictions who had, so to speak, lost their Marxist [oligarchic] footing, it steadfastly avoided the flat assurances of the old, ideologically driven Left [Right]. . . . Its writers have developed a new version of the 'union of theory and practice,' joining moral commitment and political criticism, the two directed simultaneously against the conventional wisdom of the intelligentsia [demos] and the tyrannical rule of the established elites [the many] in both the state and the economy [society]."

(Thucydides) were dead before others (Aristotle) were born. Many of its members spent considerable parts of their adult lives outside Athens. And yet, through the medium of reading and writing texts in many and varied genres, latecomers to the community were able to learn from and to argue with their deceased elders as well as their contemporaries.⁶⁴ The circulation of texts also allowed the adherents of mutually hostile schools (e.g., Plato's Academy and Isocrates' school of rhetoric) to debate with one another through writing and therefore to function as members of a single community of interpretation.⁶⁵

A community of interpretation will have space for fierce disagreements over specifics, but its members must share certain values and employ common vocabularies. The intellectual community imagined in this book is defined by three primary values: Its members were *literate*, *dissident*, and *agonistic*. They competed with one another in what might be described as the "game" (*agōn*) of writing the most powerful critical description and analysis of democracy and the best prescription for what to do about the rule of the Athenian demos. Our assessment of Ps.-Xenophon's *Political Regime of the Athenians* suggests that many of the "rules of the game"—the general vocabularies of main ideas and terminology (although not the full articulation of ideas or the precise meanings of terms)—were set by the third quarter of the fifth century and remained fairly stable thereafter. As noted above, the Athenian critics of democracy were remarkably free and inventive in terms of genre—historiography, comic poetry, philosophical dialogue, and epideictic rhetoric were only some of the major genres in which critical political theory was written in democratic Athens. And yet it seems that to be recognized as a player in the game, it was essential to engage with a relatively familiar set of ideas and to employ a familiar range of sociological, political, ethical, and moral terminology. At least one object of the game was victory in making one's own distinct critical voice recognized—heard and applauded—by other players: by friends and foes, by students and masters, by contemporaries and those yet to come. Recognition, in the form of attention and argumentative response, was granted to those capable of redeploying familiar ideas in striking ways and suggesting variant definitions for familiar terms.⁶⁶

If victory over one's rivals within the critical community was one object of the game, another and closely related object was (per B.1 above) to score a moral victory over the democratic *politeia* itself. Fifth- and fourth-century democratic political culture presented itself as the best—most just, most natural, and most effective—actual or conceivable form of human (i.e., Greek) political organiza-

⁶⁴ There is a large and growing modern literature on ancient literacy and its cultural significance. See, for example, Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Literacy and Orality*; W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*; Robb, *Literacy and Paideia*; Steiner, *Tyrant's Writ*.

⁶⁵ The concept of a "community of interpretation": Fish, *Is There a Text?*

⁶⁶ Cf. Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, esp. 22–23, on political philosophy as a special tradition of discourse, which imposes rules of expression on even the most radical of its practitioners; and Walzer (*Company of Critics*, 17), who notes that since "our faults are named and numbered in so many different ways, the critics must compete for our attention and they do that by criticizing one another."

tion; the self-confidence of the “political regime of the Athenians” is evident in the idealized (if ultimately conflicted) portrait of democratic Athens offered in Thucydides’ account of Pericles’ Funeral Oration of 430 B.C. (below, 2.C.3). Each critic of democracy attempted to show that this sort of self-satisfied assessment was in error; and thus he presented his text as a rival to Athenian political culture. We need not suppose that the democracy itself paid much conscious attention to the contest being waged (although see below, 7.C). With two notable exceptions (Socrates and Aristophanes), the members of the critical community (qua social critics) seem to have escaped both the dangerously hostile attention of the demos and its generously frank admiration. The contest between a given critical text and the democratic system would be judged *imprimis* by the readership of the critical community. But pragmatically serious purposes also sustained dissident writing. The hope of making the Athenian *politeia* better arguably informed the work of each of the authors considered here.

C.2. *Immanent versus Rejectionist Critics?*

To speak of serious purposes is to raise the difficult issue of what the authors of Greek political texts intended their writing to do to or for democracy. It is tempting to imagine a linear political spectrum, ranging from the committed enemy of democracy who hopes fervently for the immediate and violent overthrow of the demos to the committed friend of democracy who wants nothing more than to point out contingent flaws in the operations of an admirable system. Yet specifying the sensibilities and practical intentions of ancient authors with a degree of precision suitable to their placement on a hypothetical political spectrum seems over-optimistic, even for an analysis that regards authorial intent as partially recoverable.⁶⁷ Alternatively, following a typology of political criticism developed by Michael Walzer, we might choose to divide the Athenian critical community into the two general categories of internal “immanent” critics and detached “rejectionist” critics. An immanent critic (the sort Walzer decidedly prefers) is a reformer, rather than a revolutionary. This sort of critic regards the society under examination as capable of amelioration within the framework of the existing regime. She will therefore work within a set of norms and values already prevalent (if temporarily dormant) within her own political culture. The force of her criticism is not destructive; rather, she calls the citizens to be true to their own highest and finest cultural ideals. The rejectionist critic, by contrast, typically engages in a form of what Sheldon Wolin has called “epic theory.” She regards the society in question as incapable of significant amelioration without resort to

⁶⁷ The complexity of critical political intention is suggested by Tocqueville’s injunction to the English translator of *Democracy in America* (editor’s introduction, xi) not to make his views seem antidemocratic or proaristocratic: I say severe things about French society and democracy in general because we live in a society in which the “cause for equality” is won, and the only “honorable” thing is therefore to write about the bad tendencies of equality “in order to prevent my contemporaries from surrendering to them. . . . But I say these things as a friend and not as a censor. Just because I am a friend do I say these things.”

revolution. She consequently seeks to challenge and ultimately to overthrow the dominant values of the society and to replace them by another, notionally superior, set of values. Those new values are typically supposed by the external critic to be in conformity with some higher reality: with the will of God, nature, or Truth itself.⁶⁸

Among the authors under consideration here, Aristophanes seems a reasonable candidate to be a Walzerian internal critic of Athens; Plato seems to fit the role of the rejectionist external critic. And yet even these two cases are complex: it is quite possible to identify “immanent” aspects of Plato’s political dialogues and “rejectionist” moments in Aristophanes’ plays. Despite the evidently epic nature of his text, it seems no more meaningful to characterize Thucydides as a straightforwardly rejectionist critic than it would be to regard Isocrates as a genuinely friendly immanent critic, despite the latter’s expressed hope of recalling democracy to its finest ideals. Walzer’s distinction between internal and external critics, developed specifically in reference to critics of modern liberal political regimes, may be more useful to the intellectual historian of classical antiquity as a heuristic device for clarifying different authorial stances within a corpus (or even within a given text) than as a typology for categorizing individual authors.⁶⁹ In each of the following chapters I will touch on what I imagine to be the author’s goals and intentions, at least as far as I regard them as even hypothetically recoverable. Attended as voices of immanent criticism, the Athenian critics of popular rule arguably participated in the processes by which democratic political culture evolved in the course of the late fifth and fourth centuries B.C. (below, 7.C). But at least until the last half of the fourth century, Ps.-Xenophon’s original *aporia* continued to haunt rejectionist voices, insofar as they sought to answer the revolutionary’s eternal question, “What is to be done?”

Finally, is it possible to say anything about the actual membership of the Athenian critical community? Only in the sense that it must have been “bigger than a breadbox, but smaller than a doghouse.” The “breadbox” in this case is the set of seven authors I have chosen to discuss in this book. There are well-known Athenian political theorists and critics of democracy whose surviving works are not discussed in detail here (e.g., Antiphon, Xenophon, Critias, and Antisthenes). The names of some Athenian critical writers are lost, and Socrates was not necessarily the only important member of the community who was an active

⁶⁸ Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* and *Company of Critics*. Cf. Rorty, *Contingency*, 60; Bell, *Communitarianism*, 64–65. Epic theory: Wolin, “Political Theory as a Vocation,” 1078 – 80, citing Plato’s criticism of Athenian democracy as an example.

⁶⁹ Although Walzer (*Company of Critics*) discusses the long history of political criticism, beginning with the prophetic biblical tradition and Socrates (whom he regards as a model internal critic) and Plato (an exemplary detached critic), he regards modern liberal society as manifesting special characteristics affecting the practice of criticism. Nightingale (*Genres*, 190–92) similarly contrasts Plato as an example of an “outsider/socially disembedded” writer with Aristophanes as an “insider” in terms of their relationship to the democratic city. She suggests that, for Plato, it was the comedian’s “insider” status that prevented him from gaining the disinterested perspective necessary for truth-seeking.

talker (and reader) but not a writer.⁷⁰ I have in mind two largish “doghouses”: the set of all classical Athenian writers, and the set of all classical Athenian social critics. As noted above, there must have been many “local critics” of various aspects of Athenian society and politics whose voices are now lost to us. Most of them, surely, were not writers or readers of political theory, and so, by the definition employed here, these local critics were not “paid-up members” of the literary-intellectual critical community. Yet it would be a mistake to think of the boundaries of political dissent as impermeable. Socrates sought to draw ordinary Athenians into critical conversations, and Aristophanes, as a comic poet who wrote for a huge audience, must certainly have been in touch with any number of local critics, as sources of comic inspiration and as members of his intended audience.⁷¹

Nor, obviously, were all Athenian writers social critics. Authors of dithyrambic poetry, for example, were focused on other matters. Herodotus and the tragedians, although deeply concerned with political ideas and sometimes critical of democracy, do not, on the face of it, appear to be “political dissenters” in the sense I am attempting to develop here.⁷² But that said, it seems quite certain that the critical community played an important role in the literary and intellectual history of classical Athens. “How to criticize democracy” was a central problem for classical Athenian intellectuals. By the end of the fifth century, it seems to have become *the* central problem: I would suggest that after 404 B.C., in order to be taken

⁷⁰ Antiphon: fragments in DK 87, with Ostwald, “*Nomos and Phusis*.” A reading of Xenophon as a critic of democracy might fruitfully focus on *Memorabilia* 1.2.40–46, *Apology of Socrates*, and the philo-Laonian aspects of the *Politeia of the Lacedaemonians*, *Hellenica*, and *Anabasis*. Johnstone, “Virtuous Work,” discusses the aristocratic ideology of *Economicus* and *On Hunting*. Critias: fragments in DK 88, with Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty*, 462–65. The case for Critias as a critical writer is even stronger if he is the author of [Herodes] *Peri Politeias*, as argued by Wade-Gery, “Critias and Herodes.” Prince (“Antisthenes on Language,” 16–20, 226–74) argues that Antisthenes was motivated by the circumstances of Athenian democracy and discusses his critical engagement with Gorgias, Xenophon, Plato, and Isocrates. Yunis, *Taming*, 36–58, reviews fifth-century literature critical of democracy and public deliberation; McInerney, “Politicizing the Past,” carries the story into the later fourth century. The traces of anonymous antidemocratic Greek literature (e.g., *P. Heidelberg* 182, the Theramenes papyrus) and antidemocratic writing by non-Athenians (e.g., the fragments of Stesimbrotus of Thasos and Theopompus of Chios’ digression on Athenian demagogues) are reviewed by Rhodes, *Commentary*, 121–23.

⁷¹ Most Athenians probably did not read with fluency. On the limited scope of literacy in classical Athens, see W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 65–115; Hedrick “Writing, Reading.” Walzer (*Company of Critics*, 22) argues that “criticism derives ultimately from common complaint” –which obviously need not first arise in literate circles—and therefore should be explained in terms of the contradictions and social conflicts reflected in common complaint.

⁷² Dithyrambic poetry: Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb*, 25–59. Herodotus’ political thought is discussed by Thompson, *Herodotus*. For Herodotus on democracy, see below, 2.n.6. Tragedy as political theory (a small sampling of a large and growing literature): by political theorists: Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*; Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 50–89; Rocco, *Tragedy and Enlightenment*. By classicists: Meier, *Discovery*, 82–139, *Political Art*; Crane, “Politics of Consumption”; Zeitlin, *Playing the Other*; Mendelsohn, “Altered States”; Dougherty, “Democratic Contradictions”; Rosenbloom, “Tragedy of Power”; Grif fith, “Brilliant Dynasts”; Gof *History, Tragedy, Theory*.

seriously as an Athenian intellectual, it was necessary to participate in the criticism of popular rule and to participate on the terms established by Athens' "critical community."⁷³ If this is correct, then not only was democracy the definitive factor in Athenian political life and public discourse, but "democracy as a problem" became the definitive factor in Athenian intellectual life and literary discourse.

⁷³ For the place of the Attic orators in this hypothetical scheme, see below, 7.C.

Public Speech and Brute Fact: Thucydides

A. SUBJECT AND AUTHOR

The author of the work we now call “The History of the Peloponnesian War” introduces his text with the statement that Thucydides the Athenian began working on his account of the war between the Athenians and the Peloponnesians right at the beginning of the war (431 B.C.) because at the time he expected (*elpisas*) that it would be great and most worthy of recording—the two main opponents (Athens and Sparta) being at the height of their strength and preparation—and because he saw (*kai . . . horōn*) that the rest of the Greek world was either allied to or inclining toward one side or the other (1.1.1). Thus, the text, its subject (the war), and the author’s work as a historian have in this opening sentence a common point of origin. From the very start, Thucydides hints that there is both a connection and a distinction between inference and observation: he *saw* the situations of the two opponents and the rest of Greece, and he (thereby) *inferred* that the war would be great and noteworthy. And, as we are told in the next sentence, Thucydides was correct in his prediction: the disturbance (*kinēsis*) caused by the war was not only great among the Hellenes, it involved a certain part of the barbarian world, and finally engulfed practically the whole of mankind (1.1.2). The only emendation of Thucydides’ original (prewar) assessment suggested in his second (explicitly postwar) sentence is that the conflict turned out to involve barbarians as well as Greeks.¹

¹ Greek text: H. Stuart-Jones (OCT, 1900–1902, with revised app. crit. by J. E. Powell, 1942). Translations: R. Crawley (Everyman, 1910; Free Press, 1996 [= *Landmark Thucydides*]), R. Warner (Penguin, rev. ed., 1972). Commentaries: Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover, *HCT*; Hornblower, *Commentary* (2 vols. to date). Earlier drafts of parts of this chapter appeared as Ober, “Civic Ideology,” “Thucydides’ Criticism,” and “Thucydides Theoretikos.” Thucydides’ political viewpoint is far from transparent. The loci classici are 2.65 (praise of Pericles, see below, 2.C.4), and 8.97 (praise of the broad-based oligarchy of the Five Thousand). Modern readings have placed Thucydides all around the political map; e.g., J. Finley, *Thucydides*, 237: Thucydides was by nature a democrat incapable of conceiving a great progressive city except as a democracy. Woodhead, *Thucydides*, 34–35: Thucydides did not approve of democracy. De Romilly, *Thucydides*, 350–51, and “Alcibiade,” 93–105: Thucydides sought to defend a principled democracy against the oligarchs of 404 and was an advocate of a “mixed constitution.” Grene, *Greek Political Theory*, 35–42: Thucydides was a moderate oligarch, who preferred the rule of the intelligent few and saw democracy’s shortcomings as key to Athenian military failure. Dover in *HCT* 5: 335–39: Thucydides’ preference was for the moderate oligarchy of the Five Thousand. Abbott, *Thucydides*, 109–48, esp. 128: Thucydides “holds a brief” for neither democracy nor oligarchy but exposes the weaknesses of each. Connor, *Thucydides*, 237–42 (with review of literature): Thucydides was neither a simple antidemocrat nor a proponent of oligarchy. Pope, “Thucydides and Democracy,” 276–96: Thucydides was not especially antidemocratic but regarded both democrats and oligarchs as con-

These opening sentences establish the credentials of both author and subject. The reader is alerted to the greatness of the events, the perspicacity of the historian, and the importance of the text. Thucydides did more than review past history to find events worth commemorating, he *foresaw* great events in the offing, assessed their significance accurately, and studied the action as it unfolded. The author of this text is no mere chronicler of past facts; he possesses a capacity for perceiving the general direction of future developments.² Having established his *bona fides*, Thucydides underlines the magnitude of the events he has recorded by comparing the Peloponnesian War with previous conflicts. Yet making this comparison, we soon learn, is a difficult undertaking. Because of the passage of time, Thucydides was unable to establish securely (*heurein*) events that occurred at any period prior to the recent war, much less those in the distant past. But despite the impossibility of fully reliable knowledge about early history, Thucydides was able to use a process of inference and probability (*ek tekmeriōn*) to arrive at what he felt was a sound, if somewhat shocking, conclusion: the wars and other affairs of the heroic Greek past were not really very great after all (1.1.3). Although these initial passages offer the reader no hint about the author's stance toward Athenian democracy, they begin to establish the premises from which a powerful critical argument will be developed.

A.1. *Historical Knowledge: erga versus logoi*

After a brief, but analytically important, précis of what he was able to cobble together about the earliest development of civilization in Greece (see below, 2.A.2), Thucydides returns to the issue of the reliability of historical knowledge (1.20.1–2). He reiterates that the things he was able to discover by inference about the ancient past are difficult to trust in every particular and then launches an attack on those who believe whatever they happen to hear about the past, including things about their own country, without subjecting the accounts to rigorous testing (*abasanistōs*).³ His case in point is the belief, held by “the majority (*to plēthos*) of the Athenians,” that Hipparchus (son of the tyrant Pisistratus), the man killed by Harmodius and Aristogeiton, was actually the tyrant of Athens at the time of his assassination. According to Thucydides, the Athe-

tributing to the breakdown of community during the Peloponnesian War. My argument here treats the text as a whole and offers no contribution to the “Thucydidean question” of composition. For this long debate, which now seems very sterile, see Dover in *HCT* 5: 361–444; Rawlings, *Structure*, 250–54; Hornblower, *Commentary*, 2: 15–16, 119–22.

² On the opening sentence, and Thucydides' willful creation of the Peloponnesian War as an object of analysis accessible only through the writer's text, see Loraux, “Thucydide a écrit la guerre”; with Edmunds, “Thucydides in the Act”; Crane, *Blinded Eye*, 28–29.

³ The term *abasanistōs* in later Greek can mean “without being put to the torture, without pain” (LSJ s.v.). Here the primary meaning must be “without proper examination.” The root term is *basanos*: the jeweller's touchstone by which the gold content of metal is assayed; it is a common metaphor in early Greek didactic poetry for the technique of discerning an individual's true value (see Levine, “Symposium and the *Polis*,” 195–96). But note Thucydides' emphasis on the difficulty (ergo pain) of his investigations, below.

nians did not know that in fact Hipparchus was the younger brother of the real tyrant (Hippias). If we envision Thucydides as a critic of democracy, this cannot be a casual example: Many Athenians apparently assumed that the assassination of Hipparchus was among the events that helped to bring about the establishment of the democratic government. By maintaining that Hipparchus was only a minor player in the drama of the tyranny, Thucydides undermines a foundation myth of the democracy and so deprives popular rule of one part of its “usable past.”⁴ The word used by Thucydides for the ignorant Athenians who supposed Hipparchus to have been tyrant—*plēthos*—is not, in this context, a value-neutral term denoting “more than half of a homogeneous population”; like “demos,” it carried strong sociopolitical connotations when used by members of the critical community in reference to the mass of ordinary citizens, who are thereby contrasted to an elite. Thus, the attentive reader is alerted to the text’s critical force: it will present facts that have been “tested” and so are much more reliable than the hodgepodge of often erroneous beliefs held by the Athenian masses—beliefs that constitute “democratic knowledge” and underlie Athens’ civic ideology.⁵

The general (and specifically popular Athenian) unwillingness to test the truth is, Thucydides has implied, bad enough when the stories have to do with the distant past. But he goes on to show that the Athenians, in common with “other Hellenes,” are equally credulous when it comes to the affairs of the present day, affairs that have not been obscured by the passage of time. To prove this point, Thucydides cites examples of two errors regarding Sparta: the beliefs that the two Spartan kings each had two votes in council and that there was a Spartan battalion called the “Pitanate *lochos*.” Thucydides sums up: “Such is the degree of carelessness among the many (*hoi polloi*) in the search for truth (*alētheia*) and their preference for ready-made accounts” (1.20.3). Although “other Hellenes” are also indicted by Thucydides’ comments, this criticism seems to be directed at two primary targets: Herodotus, whose *History* contains those two apparent errors, and the Athenian masses, who are implied by the sociologically loaded term *hoi polloi*. Thucydides thus situates his text in critical juxtaposition first to other political texts currently circulating in Athens and elsewhere, and next to the ill-founded assumptions regarded as typical of

⁴ Thucydides returns to these events in book 6, asserting (6.53.3) that the Athenians knew that it was neither themselves nor Harmodius, but the Spartans who had liberated Athens from the tyrants. He introduces his own detailed narrative of the Tyrannicide with the comment that it will show that the Athenians themselves were no more capable than others of producing accurate accounts of their own history (6.54.1). The garbled Athenian memory of the tyranny is directly associated by Thucydides with the demotic hysteria over the affair of the Herms (6.60.1; below, 2.E.2). Tyrannicide story in Thucydides and its critical force: Rawlings, *Structure*, 103–7, 256–59; Taylor, *Tyrant Slayers*; Thomas, *Oral Tradition*, 238–82, esp. 242–45. Euben (“Battle,” 361) argues that Thucydides’ Tyrannicide story “reveals human beings as creators of meaning in the context of political struggle.”

⁵ *Plēthos* as a term for the mass of ordinary citizens: Ruzé, “*Plethos*,” 259–63. Note that *plēthos* could, in the mid-fifth century, be used in official documents as a synonym for *dēmos*: ML 40 lines 22–23 (= IG I³ 14: Erythrai decree).

the Athenian masses: *to plēthos* and *hoi polloi*. Moreover, his equation of the Athenian many with “other Hellenes” casts a prospective shadow on subsequent claims by historical actors about Athenian exceptionalism in regard to intellectual attainments.⁶

Having chastised the many for their ignorance and carelessness in regard to the truth, Thucydides then (1.21.1) asserts the relative trustworthiness of his own brief account of the distant past: the reader will not go too far wrong in believing Thucydides’ inferential account, which is based on the clearest possible sources of evidence (*ek epiphanestatōn sēmeiōn*). In any event, Thucydides’ compressed ancient history is, he says, more reliable than the accounts of either the poets or the writers of prose (*logographoi*)—take the latter term as potentially including other historians (especially Herodotus) and writers of prose essays like Ps.-Xenophon, but also certain of Athens’ public orators.⁷ The poets are unbelievable because they try to make the events of which they sing seem greater than they actually were. The prose writers are more concerned with being persuasive to listeners (*tēi akroasei*) than with hewing close to the truth. The events the *logographoi* relate cannot be checked (*anexelenkta*) because they are too distant in time, and indeed, they “have won their way into the realm of the fabulous” (*epi to muthōdes eknenikēkota*). This last phrase, along with the charge that poets overinflate the greatness of their own subjects, hints at a contest; this becomes explicit when Thucydides refuses to engage in the

⁶ Edmunds (“Thucydides in the Act,” 846–47) points out the criticism of democracy implicit in 1.20.1–3 and notes (849) that “the authority of Thucydides rests on the assumption that his readership shares [his] aristocratic political ideology.” Criticism aimed at Herodotus: Hornblower *Commentary*, ad loc. Thucydides’ determination to distance himself from Herodotus and other fifth-century writers of histories (on whom, see Fowler, “Herodotus”); Crane, *Blinded Eye*, 1–9 and passim; Bowie, “Beginnings,” 146–47. Although I do not treat Herodotus as a member of the Athenian critical community, his text has much to say on a subject Thucydides intended to make his own: the historical relationship between Athenian foreign-policy success and democracy; see, recently, Georges, *Barbarian Asia*, 115–206, and Metcalfe, “Herodotus and Athens,” each arguing that Herodotus is systematically critical of democracy.

⁷ *Logographos* is not used again in Thucydides’ text, but I see no reason to suppose that it meant something to Thucydides that was radically different from what it meant to fourth-century philosophers and orators. Plato (*Phdr.* 257c) claims that the orator Lysias was accused by an Athenian politician of being a *logographos*; here the term clearly means speechwriter. It had the same meaning when used by the Attic orators: Lavency, *Aspects*; Yunis, *Taming*, 175 n. 3. Connor (*Thucydides*, 28) translates *logographoi* as “speechwriters” in the Thucydides passage and notes Thucydides’ concern with rhetoric. As Aristotle points out (*Rhet.* 1418a21–29), speeches presented in Assembly deal with the affairs of the future, and speeches were the basis of decision-making in the democracy. Speeches (including occasional Assembly speeches) were, by the end of the fifth century, certainly being written down by Gorgias, Isocrates, Lysias, and Andocides. Cartledge (“Fowl Play,” 49–50) suggests that Antiphon was the first Athenian *logographos* to publish speeches, probably in the 420s. The simplistic depiction of history in Athenian Assembly debates: Thomas, *Oral Tradition*, 197–206. On Thucydides’ crowd-pleasing poets (including Homer and Simonides, who wrote a narrative elegy commemorating the battle of Plataea), see C. J. Mackie, “Homer and Thucydides,” esp. 112–13; Boedeker, “Simonides.” Cole (*Origins*, 62–63), argues (on the basis of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*) that criticism of poets as implausible and poor educators was a sophistic commonplace. Nagy (*Pindar’s Homer*, 215–338) regards Herodotus as an example of a prose writer whose text was produced in self-conscious competition with the song-master (*aiodos*).

“contest (*agōnisma*) for current listening pleasure” (1.22.4; see below). Thucydides locates the quasi-historical accounts presented by the poets and (other) prose writers in the context of a tournament of words; the victor’s reward will be public acclaim and the easy belief of the gullible many.⁸

Of course, Thucydides himself has previously introduced a competition between the “greatness” of the Peloponnesian War (the subject of his text) and all previous events. But this contest, he informs the reader, will not be judged by popular acclaim. Although (1.21.2) it is human nature (*kaiper tōn anthrōpōn*) for men to overrate the war in which they are engaged while they are fighting it, and then, once it is over, to fall back into naive wonderment at the glories of the distant past—*this* war will demonstrate to anyone who is willing to pay attention to the facts themselves (*ho polemos houtos . . . ap’ autōn tōn ergōn skopousi dēlōsei*) that it was the greatest of all. Here Thucydides introduces a conception that is central to his critical project: the superior importance and self-evident significance for the interpreter of the past of what really happened, of the brute facts about what was really done (*ta erga*).⁹ In this sentence, it is the war itself that demonstrates, by means of the facts themselves, its own greatness. The historian, along with the necessity of the words of his text as a conduit for an apprehension of the facts, has suddenly disappeared. The truth about the war is no longer a matter of verbal persuasion or interpretation. It has become a self-evident matter of visual perception.¹⁰

Immediately following this remarkable and momentary disappearing act comes an explicit reminder of the presence of the author, the constructed nature of his verbal record, and its problematic relationship to historical words and deeds. Thucydides’ next sentence (1.22.1) is grammatically complex, and its precise meaning is hotly debated among modern scholars: “And as to the things expressed in speech (*logos*),” either before or during the war, neither Thucydides nor his informants could remember exactly what was said. But, Thucydides implies, this is not really a problem: “So, [given the impossibility of perfect recall,] I have recorded the various things that seemed to me (*edokoun emoi*) to be especially necessary to say in regard to the general circumstances involved

⁸ Cf. Flory, “Meaning,” 200–201; Hornblower *Commentary*, 2: 26–27.

⁹ See esp. 1.22.2: *ta erga tōn prachthentōn*. *Ergon* as “fact”: Parry, *Logos*, 13, 20–21, 76–89, and esp. 92–93: *ergon* can mean anything wrought or done, or deeds of war, or the whole business of war. “But then there is a slightly different direction in the meaning of *ergon*, whereby it stands for *fact*, or *reality*, the thing that was *actually* done. It is this side of the word that makes it appropriate for the *logos/ergon* antithesis.” As Parry points out (loc. cit.), the two meanings of *ergon* as fact and as deed are quite close and are often conjoined in Thucydides. Thus, *ergon* in the antithesis “means *external reality*, but then it also means the *deeds of war*, and so *war*; and by insisting on this, Thucydides presents war as *the reality*, *the* complex of external forces within which the human intellect strives and operates.” Similarly, see Immerwahr, *Ergon*, 276–81.

¹⁰ Cf. 1.1.1.1, with its implied connection and distinction between observation and interpretation. Thucydides’ “disappearance” into his text: Loraux, “Thucydide a écrit la guerre.” Connor (*Thucydides*, 29; cf. 248) notes that at 1.21.2, “The third person narrative of the opening sentence yields to a new speaker: the war itself.” Visual perception becomes much more problematic later in the history: below, 2.n.114.

in each case,¹¹ holding as close as possible to the overall sense of what was actually said.” This seemingly rather casual approach to accuracy in the recording of the speeches delivered by participants in the war is then sharply contrasted to the historian’s stance on the actual events:

But with regard to those things (*erga*) that were actually done in the war, I did not deem it the correct approach to write down the facts according to the account of the first informant I came across, nor [did I write them down] just as appeared right to me (*oud’ hōs emoi edokei*); but rather in respect both to events at which I was myself present, and to the accounts of others, [I deemed it the correct approach to write down the facts only after] having investigated (*epexelthōn*) each one as vigorously as possible in regard to accuracy (*akribeia*).¹² (1.22.2)

Here the contrast between *logoi* (speeches that need not be recorded exactly and can include arguments that “seemed necessary” to the current author) and *erga* (facts that must be recorded as accurately as humanly possible and must *not* be presented just as seemed right to the author) is explicit. The contrast introduces the centrally important “in words *x* / but in fact *y*” antithesis that underpins much of Thucydides’ analysis of political affairs.¹³

Erga occupy a privileged place in Thucydides’ narrative in relation to *logoi*. Speeches (especially those spoken in public by self-interested politicians) and facts often collide in the world constructed by Thucydides’ text. As we shall see, individual men and states (i.e., men deploying power as organized collec-

¹¹ My translation here attempts to catch the simultaneous “generality” of the things that “always” need to be said in cases that are similar (cf. below) and the particularity of the specific cases.

¹² My translation here is based on Crawley’s (“But it [my account] rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible”). Cf. Gomme in *HCT*, and Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc.: there is a long-standing controversy about whether *epexelthōn* should be taken with both the reports of others and what Thucydides personally saw, or only with the reports of others. I take it with both because it seems logically entailed by “not just as seemed right to myself.” There is (as long recognized: opp. cit.) a good deal of parallelism and implied contrast between this sentence, on the *erga*, and the previous sentence (1.22.1), on the *logoi*. In both there is a reference to Thucydides’ own experience and that of his informants; in neither can he (alone) or his informants be completely trusted. But in the latter case, *akribeia* is implicitly considered possible; in the former, it is said to be *chalepon*. In the former, “it seemed right to me”; in the second, “it did not seem right to me.” Throughout there is a privileging of *erga* versus *logoi*—*erga* can be known with *akribeia* if accounts are put to the test. *Logoi* probably cannot be known with *akribeia*, and anyway, they are not worth the effort it would take to try to reconstruct them. This sentence is one of the most controversial in Thucydides. See, recently, Swain, “Thucydides 1.22.1” (Thucydides sought to accurately reproduce the actual intended meaning, although not the exact words, of each speaker); Yunis, *Taming*, 61–66 (the speeches were free inventions by Thucydides himself) Flory, “Thucydides’ Hypotheses”; Hornblower *Commentary*, ad loc. Cogan (*Human Thing*, esp. x–xiv) seems to miss the force of the antithesis and claims that the speeches were accurately reported by Thucydides. Luschkat, “Thukyides,” 1167–79, surveys earlier literature.

¹³ The *logos/ergon* distinction is not unique, or even original to Thucydides (see, e.g., Gorgias *Palamedes* 34), but Thucydides’ reconfiguration of the antithesis is very much his own. Parry, “*Logos*,” remains seminal on the antithesis and Thucydides’ use of it; cf. Swain, “Thucydides 1.22.1,” esp. 35–36.

tives) who attempt to impose their own speech-dependent meanings on brute facts come to bad ends. This pattern in the text is significant from the perspective of reading Thucydides as a critic of democracy: Most Athenians, like other Hellenes, as Thucydides has explained, believe silly things about their own past and about the institutional practices of their opponents. They came to believe these errors through listening to pleasing poetry and equally pleasing accounts of *logographoi*; poetry and *logoi* are full of mistakes because they are composed by contestants who seek to win the applause of an uncritical and pleasure-seeking audience. Erroneous beliefs will lead to making practical errors in the real world if they are employed in decision-making; they will lead to potentially disastrous policy mistakes when used as the basis for national policy. In democratic Athens, it was the ordinary people, sitting in public Assembly, who made policy decisions. Since they had no special education or knowledge, they made these decisions on the basis of the information they picked up from the general culture (generically from “poetry”) and from what they heard from speakers in the Assembly (*logoi*). If the decision-making Assemblymen learn wrong things about the past from their culture and in the speeches they hear, how is it possible for them consistently to decide rightly in regard to the future? Thucydides’ narrative suggests that under these conditions, a consistent national policy over the long term was simply not possible. If it could be sustained by the empirical evidence of an objective historical narrative (which is what Thucydides’ text is often taken to be), this chain of reasoning would be a devastating criticism of Athenian democracy.¹⁴

The *logos/ergon* contrast is underlined by an implied contrast in the passages cited above: in the historiographical approach that “seemed right” to Thucydides in regard to *logoi* and “did not seem right” to him in regard to *erga*. The comment “not just as appeared right to me” (*oud’ hōs emoi edokei*) in the last passage (on how to report *erga*) contrasts not only with the “as seemed right to me” (*edokoun emoi*) of the previous sentence (on the construction of *logoi*), but also with a string of similar *edokei moi* constructions earlier in the text. Thucydides’ earlier uses of *edokei moi* and the like were in reference to the historian’s inferences about ancient history, which, as we have seen, is not regarded by him as fully and accurately recoverable. Thus, through the phrase

¹⁴ True historical objectivity, if defined as the absence of perspective, the “view from nowhere,” is of course simply impossible; see, for example, Novick, *Noble Dream*. Yet it is important to keep in mind that Thucydides’ motive for claiming to be “objective” was not the same as that of the “scientific” historians of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries who attempted (and attempt) to follow von Ranke’s dictum that it is the historian’s duty to relate history “wie es eigentlich gewesen.” Thucydides was not writing within the confines of an established discipline, or for a disciplinary audience. And thus it seems to me relatively meaningless to criticize him for not being “truly” objective by Rankean standards (cf. below, 2.n.19). Objectivity is, I believe, a rhetorical stance for Thucydides, one that offered him a needed point d’appui for his critical project; cf. White, *Metahistory*, with Kramer, “Literature,” 104–5, on modern historians’ employment of the “trope of irony,” which situates the historian in a realm of realism denied the historical actors he or she studies. Hornblower (*Thucydides*, 155–90) points out Thucydides’ authorial self-certainty and the rarity of this stance in ancient historiography.

“as seemed right to me,” nonrecoverable (or only partly recoverable) events of the distant past are implicitly equated with nonrecoverable (due to imperfect memory) speeches delivered during or just before the war. When Thucydides says that he reported *erga* “not just as appeared right to me,” he signals a contrast between distant events and speeches on the one hand, and accurately recoverable facts about the war on the other. Speeches and early history are necessarily understood through appearance, more or less well-informed opinion, and inference; while accurate facts about recent events can be understood as objectively true.¹⁵ As we have seen (1.B.2), the enactment formula of the Athenian Assembly was “It appeared right to the Assembly that . . .” (*edoxe tōi dēmōi* . . .). Thus, when Thucydides removed facts from the realm of affairs that could properly be understood by the common culture, through listening to competing speeches, or by reference to examples drawn from a distant past, he also implicitly removed facts from the realm of things that could properly be processed by the standard procedures of the Athenian democratic government. The citizen Assembly was preeminently the realm of competitive speech, opinion, and collective interpretation. In the sentence cited above, seeming is distinguished from being; the facts themselves have been removed to a realm *beyond* interpretation—and certainly beyond the interpretative capacity of ordinary citizens sitting in public Assembly.

But Thucydides is not a simple sort of critic, and he recognized that the problem of perspective presented a challenge to his goal of understanding and presenting to his readers the objective facts about the recent past.¹⁶ He immediately complicates the notion that facts might be objective entities that can exist in a realm beyond perspective:

But my investigation proved very laborious, because the witnesses to each of the things that actually happened (*tois ergois*) did not relate the same things about these things, but rather [each spoke] according to his individual partiality (*eunoia*) for one side or the other, or according to individual memory. (1.22.3)

In his prior discussion on how he treated speeches and events (1.22.1–2), Thucydides had established a hierarchical relationship between only imperfectly knowable ancient history and accurately recoverable recent history, and between *logoi* and *erga*. There he stated that, although speeches neither could be nor need be reported exactly, he subjected all reports of events (as well as his own perceptions) to the most rigorous scrutiny. But here he reminds the reader that his own knowledge of the *erga* was, necessarily, largely a product of listening to things said by others about what had actually happened in the war, and

¹⁵ Cf. Edmunds, *Chance*, 166–67. *Edokei moi* passages from earlier in the text: 1.3.2, 1.3.3, 1.9.1, 1.9.3, 1.10.4. Later examples: Pope, “Thucydides and Democracy” 281. For the contrasts in 1.22.1–3, see Wille, “Stil,” with the comments of Cole, *Origins*, 104–5. The assertion of the authority to speak “as seems best to me” is a topos dating back to Homer (e.g., *Il.* 13.735: Poulydamas will advise *hōs moi dokei einai arista*; cf. *Il.* 9.103 [Nestor], 9.314 [Achilles]), and we are reminded, therefore, of Thucydides’ *agōn* with the poets.

¹⁶ Cf. Parry, “*Logos*,” 48, 83–88.

that these *logoi* were recounted by multiple witnesses, each of whom imposed his own ideological perspective on his narrative, and whose memory was imperfect. Thucydides' account of *erga* is thus based on biased *logoi*.

The reader is now set for the grand revelation: How did Thucydides extract the pure gold of objective historical truth (*alētheia*) about events from the base alloys of multiple, tendentious verbal accounts? What is the skillful method—in fifth-century Greek terms, the *technē*—that elevates the current writer's record of the past above the error-ridden accounts of poets and *logographoi*?¹⁷ Presumably at the heart of the historian's craft is a process of rigorous testing. Thucydides has previously complained that people tend to believe things "untested" (*abasanistōs*) and that the reports of the *logographoi* are "not capable of being tested" (*anexelenkta*). By contrast, he claims to have checked out (*epexelthōn*) the truth of reports exhaustively. What exactly does this process entail? How are narratives of past events put to the test? What is the touchstone by which the historian tests the gold content of others' accounts?

Yet the master craftsman will not reveal his secrets, and the anticipated revelation never comes. In the place of a methodological explanation of how objective historical truth is extracted, the reader is presented with what appears at first to be a digression on the probable reception of Thucydides' text: "When people listen to (*kai es . . . akroasin*) my account, the very lack of fables (*muthōdes*) will probably make it appear rather unpleasant (*aterpesteron*)" (1.22.4). Here the language draws an explicit contrast between Thucydides' unpleasant fable-free history and the accounts of the poets and *logographoi*, which were written with an eye toward a favorable reception and which may win their way into the province of fable.¹⁸ The reader has now been warned: the investigation of the facts about the war was a lot of work for Thucydides, he does not intend to reveal to us the craftsman's technique for extracting historical objectivity from subjective accounts. Moreover, readers used to the pleasures of poetry and logography should not expect to enjoy Thucydides' unadorned and therefore "unpleasant" narrative. So why should one bother to read it? The answer comes in the next sentence:

But as many as wish genuinely to understand (*to saphes skopein*) that which happened in the past and that which will happen in the future—a future that over time, in accordance with human nature (*kata to anthrōpinon*), will be much the same as the past, or at least similar—if they judge this account useful, that is quite enough [for me]. It is as a possession for all time rather than as an entry into the contest (*agōnisma*) for current listening pleasure that I wrote.¹⁹ (1.22.4)

¹⁷ Cole, *Origins*, offers a highly original history of the concept of *technē* in Greek literature; I cannot, however, accept his argument (104–12) that Thucydides intended the speeches in his text as practical examples of persuasive rhetoric, to be mastered and adapted as necessary by prospective rhetors.

¹⁸ Cf. Flory, "Meaning," 198–200; Edmunds, "Thucydides in the Act," 847–48, noting (with de Romilly, "Condamnation du plaisir," 142–48) the political implications: it is democracy that is associated with "the pleasures of the moment."

¹⁹ For the claim that history should be in some sense useful, see Edmunds, *Chance*, 149–55;

This is a heady claim: those willing to do the hard work of reading this text with the care it demands will be rewarded with genuine understanding (*to saphes skopein*) of both the past and (at least in its general lines) the future. Thus, Thucydides' readers may legitimately hope to achieve a position similar to that which the author claimed for himself in the text's opening sentence: they will have learned how to recognize the significance of great things still in the offing. Readers will not gain this skill by means of a methodological lesson of the sort that other contemporary Athenian teacher-intellectuals might offer them. Rather, it is through being confronted with Thucydides' text itself—which presents itself as a disinterested narrative and analysis of great political events, written without concern for the amusement of an audience—that they will come to an understanding of two great and complex phenomena that conspire to create future tendencies.²⁰ As the previous narrative on ancient history has already hinted, these phenomena are human nature (*to anthrōpinon*) and the nature of power (*dunamis, archē, kratos*).

The text's claim to offer an accurate understanding of both past and future underwrites the reader's conviction that, despite the historian's statement that he began his work because he realized that the war would be "most worthy of recording" (*axiologōtatos*), Thucydides' account is emphatically not merely "history for its own sake." Its illocutionary force is more than the construction of a verbal monument intended to assure that great deeds do not pass into undeserved oblivion—the explicit justification for Herodotus' *Histories*.²¹ Thucydides' text is intended as a thoroughly tested, trustworthy, useful, empirically derived critical theory of political affairs in the form of a precise chronological

Rawlings, *Structure*, 254–63; Connor, *Thucydides*, 243–48; Flory, "Meaning." Gomme, in *HCT* 1: 149–50, argues that "the future things" are future still to Thucydides, but assumed to be past to the reader. Thus, Thucydides does not suggest that his work will be of any help to one who hopes to understand what is still in his own future; and ergo, Thucydides is not to be taken as giving practical advice for political agents. Gomme's argument strains the sense of the passage and is predicated on seeing Thucydides as a historian, with a modern historian's interests; cf. Ste. Croix, *Origins*, 30–33. For Thucydides qua "modern, scientific" historian, see Abbot, *Thucydides*, esp. 10–42; Cochrane, *Thucydides*. The other side of the "modernist Thucydides" coin is to view Thucydides as a dishonest historian, who knew that historians should be objective, but willfully decided not to be: e.g., Wallace, "Thucydides"; Hunter *Thucydides*, esp. 177–84; Badian, "Thucydides and the Outbreak," esp. 64: "It is time to appreciate the perfect skill of the advocate claiming a passion for objectivity." Cf. Gomme, in *HCT* 1: 144–47: Thucydides cannot be regarded as objective, as *no* historian truly can; Rawlings, *Structure*, 263–72: no meaningful line can be drawn between the historian as reporter of events and historian as artist; Connor, "Post Modernist" (survey of the debate) and *Thucydides*, esp. 235–36: the text is complex and forces the reader to challenge positions that the text itself seems to establish.

²⁰ Methodological lessons: see below, Chapters 4–6; cf. Cole, *Origins*, 125: "The only true transmission of an entire 'art' is, in Plato's view, that which involves, not a set of selected samples, but all the metalanguage which explains how those samples are arrived at." Thucydides' didactic techniques are discussed by Hunter, *Thucydides*, 179–83; Connor, *Thucydides*; Farrar, *Origins*, esp. 131–32; Edmunds, "Thucydides in the Act"; Arnold, "Persuasive Style."

²¹ Hdt. 1.1. Lateiner (*Historical Method*, 6–10) compares Herodotus' stated intentions with those of Hecataeus and Thucydides.

prose narrative. This critical theory is in turn based on specific understandings of human nature and political power. It offers a powerful challenge, on several fronts, to Thucydides' intellectual contemporaries who wrote and conversed on political matters, as well as to the hegemony of democratic ways of knowing and acting in the political realm.

Thucydides grounds his narrative on several interlocking assumptions; these are never argued for in detail in the text, but they are crucial for understanding his critical project. First is his assumption that what is important about the past is politics, meaning the internal governmental affairs of the major poleis, interpolis relations, and the characters, doings, and intentions of major politicians. Next is his postulate that this political past is unitary: Thucydides tells the story of a single extended chain of violent events: *a war* (*sunegrapse ton polemon*; 1.1.1) that encompassed the total period in the past that is accurately knowable through the process of historical testing.²² The collective implication of (1) the unquestionable preeminence of the political, (2) the unity of the past, and (3) the unknowability of the distant past, is that *this* text is the first real record of the past and its meaning that has yet been written—Thucydides seeks to consign his competitors to the dust heap of historiography. Furthermore, since Thucydides has done it right, no other history of the period in question will ever need to be written: speaking of the overt precipitating factors (*aitiai*) of the war (1.23.5), Thucydides states that he will run through them so that “no one need ever again search for (*zētēsai*) the sources of this war that fell upon the Hellenes.”²³

If we combine this “exhaustiveness” conclusion with Thucydides’ claim that a careful reading of his text will allow the reader to understand past and future, it becomes possible to suggest that Thucydides saw little use in anyone ever writing history after him. This “exclusivist” hypothesis, which pushes Thucydides a long way from the interests and concerns of the modern discipline of history, must be shocking if we regard Thucydides as a historian working within the context of an ongoing historical enterprise, within a tradition that

²² Thucydides’ history is political history: Hornblower, *Thucydides*, 30–32. Crane, *Blinded Eye*, 75–146, details Thucydides’ self-conscious exclusion of matters and language of the *oikos* in favor of the polis. The obvious contrast is Herodotus’ history, which was very concerned with politics but much less narrowly construed. Thucydides’ history as unitary: Loraux, “Thucydide a écrit la guerre.” Like Foucault (*Power/Knowledge*, 114–15) who inverts Clausewitz’s (*On War*, 69) dictum and argues that politics is the continuation of war by other means, Thucydides saw violence as encompassing a broad spectrum of political relationships. Thus he felt justified in including superficially peaceful interludes within the compass of a single violent event. Thucydides rejects the simple idea of war as a time just before, during, and after battle; he refuses to link the signifier *polemos* to the referent “men in armor killing one another.” And thus, he redefined (in a very influential way) the content of the concept “war.”

²³ On the striking originality of Thucydides’ conception of history, see, e.g., Jaeger, *Paideia*, 2: 380–81; Connor, *Thucydides*, 20, 31–32. Contrast Hunter, *Thucydides*, 184, and *Past and Process* (Herodotus and Thucydides as similar “scientific” or “pre-Socratic” thinkers); Scanlon, “Echoes of Herodotus.” No other history of the period ever needed: cf. Homer *Od.* 12.452–53: Odysseus remarks to Alcinous, after a four-book narrative, that “once properly told, a tale should not be repeated.”

sees the past as intrinsically worthy of study. It is much less surprising if we suppose that history was not an end in itself for Thucydides, but rather was a means to the end of developing a critical political theory.

A.2. *Three Models of State Power: The “Archaeology”*

Thucydides’ text is deeply concerned with both power and human nature. The play of power is preeminent in the “Archaeology” –the section of the history (1.2–19) in which Thucydides sketches out what he feels can reasonably be inferred about early Greek history. Thucydides’ Archaeology of early Greece centers on the process of demographic stabilization that ultimately allowed certain poleis to gain the prerequisites of power: a large population base, liquid capital, secure fortifications, and a large navy.²⁴ In the early period, the Greek peoples wandered here and there, unable to settle down for long because of raiders (*lēistai*) who attacked them by land and sea. When people did settle for a while on good land, some became greater and more powerful (*dunameis . . . meizous*) than others. This resulted in internecine conflicts (*staseis*) that ultimately destroyed these early societies (1.2.4). This passage points to the negative effects of power that is not projected outward in imperial expansion: The successful exploitation of resources (here, good land) leads to the concentration of wealth. Inequitable distribution of material goods in turn leads certain persons or groups of people in a given territory to become “greater” in respect to power than others. When the inequality becomes too obvious, it leads to *stasis*, which ultimately destroys the entire society. Apparently the process of consolidation of wealth and consequent social collapse was rapid and quite casual in the early period—the resources that could be gained by exploiting the land were relatively meager, so the power gained from those resources was relatively weak, and thus small conflicts (combined with raids launched by greedy and opportunistic outsiders) were sufficient to bring down the existing structures of power.

In order for greater power to be concentrated and for it to last longer, a stabilizing factor was required: Thucydides (1.7–8) identified this factor in the building of fortifications that allowed cities to grow up in the coastal areas that were formerly avoided because of piracy. Fortifications served to protect the population of a city by deflecting the disruptive attacks of piratical sea-raiders.

²⁴ On the Archaeology and its discussion of power, see Hunter, *Past and Process*, 17–49; Connor, *Thucydides*, 20–32, 246–48, describing the Archaeology as (26–27) “an anatomy of power” that is also “a demonstration of Thucydides’ techniques of historical analysis,” yet noting (246) how this analysis is transformed by the end of the text: great navies and financial reserves have led to expansionism and therefore vulnerability; walls have come to symbolize siege and defeat. On the “material triad” of capital, fortifications, and navy, and their relationship to the “conceptual triad” of empire, security, and instrumental power, see Ober, “Thucydides Theoretikos.” Barber’s *Strong Democracy*, 58) description of the linkage of political realism with empiricism neatly sums up the Thucydides of the Archaeology: “Politics is the application of science–sense perception organised as systematic, nomological principles—to human calculations; power is the chief concomitant of scientific politics.”

As a result of their defenses, coastal cities were able to engage in lucrative trade, which brought them reserves of liquid capital. Some cities used their amassed capital to build warships of their own. The first action each young sea power undertook was to crush the pirates, the next was to subjugate its less wealthy and more indolent neighbors (1.8). The conquered neighbors lost their freedom, but they accepted their subject status because they reaped material benefits by submitting to a powerful hegemon who would (for selfishly prudential reasons) defend them from outside threats (1.8.2–3). Thus, we have a second model of the growth of state power: in this case, the location of the nascent state near the sea means that its power (gained through the concentration of resources and protected by fortifications) could be projected outward by means of naval forces, and used to extract wealth from other states by depriving them of their freedom.

This second model, which obviously suits fifth-century imperial Athens, potentially leads to much greater and longer-lasting state power, but it is not without its complications. The expansionist state may run into various obstacles (*kōlumata*, 1.16). Obstacles may be external, that is, the presence of a greater power in the region. Thucydides cites the example of the sixth-century Ionians, who had naval power but were prevented by the more powerful Persians from expanding. The Athenian model still holds: sixth-century Persia was a land power; thus this passage foreshadows land-based Sparta's attempt to block Athenian sea-based expansionism. Other obstacles to the growth of power were internal. Thucydides' prime example of an internal obstacle to growth, the rule of a tyrant, points to the close relationship between governing authority and state power—a central concern of Ps.-Xenophon and other fifth-century political writers.²⁵ Mainland Greek tyrants, we are told, were interested only in their own personal security and in expanding the holdings of their private households, and thus they never accomplished much (1.17). Here Thucydides establishes a key distinction between the selfish personal interest of the powerful individual and the powerfulness of the state as a whole. He suggests that a state dominated by self-interested individuals will never become truly great, a principle that plays a major role in his criticism of Athenian democracy.

The Archaeology, with its explicit focus on the development of the Greek poleis, reveals that Thucydides' model of international relations is intended to apply specifically to Greece. This is significant in that Greek writers tended to associate large-scale, hegemonic imperial structures with the East—first with Lydia and then with Persia. Athenian naval forces had been a key factor in the Greek victory over Persia in 480–478 B.C., and Athens was the Greek polis most determined to pursue the anti-Persian crusade after the defeat of the eastern invaders. In the decades after the Persian Wars, some Greek writers, notably Aeschylus and Herodotus, had begun hinting that the dramatic growth of Athe-

²⁵ Notably, Herodotus, who makes much of the contrast between Greek law-abiding freedom and Persian despotism, and the effect of these governmental systems on Greek and Persian characters and on the outcome of the Persian Wars. See, for example, Georges, *Barbarian Asia*, 115–206; King, "Herodotus."

nian power might have a darker side; perhaps Athens risked self-corruption as a result of having assimilated the dangerous “Eastern” passion for creating overseas empires.²⁶ Thucydides’ Archaeology, by contrast, gives hegemony a firmly Greek prehistory. The question of whether democratic Athens is a radically new historical phenomenon—*sui generis* and unbounded by traditional assumptions about the limits of human endeavor—or whether Athens is assimilable to standard models of human, Greek, or imperial behavior is an important theme throughout Thucydides’ history.

In the scenarios sketched out above, power seems restless and destructive. The apparent conclusion is that once a state has become powerful, it has only two choices. It may attempt to extend its power (*auxēthēnai*) through conquest and, if successful, will necessarily destroy the freedom of others. Or the internal inequalities in wealth generated by the failure to deploy power externally will eventually lead to the self-destructive trauma of *stasis*. Moreover, Thucydides claims that the instrumentality of great power is normally the control of the seas; all early Greek navies were sources of strength and brought those who deployed them revenues (*chrēmata*) and empire (*archē*). By contrast, there were no wars by land that resulted in the acquisition of real power (*dunamis*, 1.15.1–2).²⁷

But there is a third model to be considered. In the fifth century B.C., Sparta was a genuinely powerful land-based state that maintained sufficient military strength to interfere successfully in the affairs of other poleis. The key to Sparta’s remarkable ability to develop into a great power without resort to the control of the sea was an extraordinary political and social stability: despite a long period of *stasis* that followed the original Dorian settlement of Lacedaemon (presumably a reference to the struggles attending the creation of the subject helot class), the Spartans had kept to the same political regime (*politeia*) for over four hundred years (1.18.1). Thucydides does not explain in this passage how the Spartans achieved their remarkable stability—a stability that resisted the tendency for populations without access to naval expansionism to degenerate into *stasis*. But he has already hinted at an ideological explanation: Although it was the Athenians who first gave up carrying weapons in public, it was the Spartans who first adopted the modern standard (*to nun tropon*) of moderation (*metria*), which meant that those individuals who possessed more property (*hoi ta meizō kektēmenoi*) than others willingly acquiesced to a style of life that was identical to that of *hoi polloi* (1.6.4). The conflicts that destroyed the early landlocked societies were, we remember (1.2.4), caused by some people becoming greater (*meizones*) than others; the Spartans apparently avoided *stasis* because citizens who possessed more (*meizō*) did not give the public appearance of being greater. Thus, Spartan power is linked with a stable *social* order that emphasizes apparent material equality among citizens as well as con-

²⁶ Athenian imperialism and its problematic association with Persia: Georges, *Barbarian Asia*; Rosenbloom, “Tragedy of Power”; Metcalfe, “Herodotus and Athens.”

²⁷ On the sociopolitical ramifications of successful imperialism, in terms of limiting the class conflicts that elsewhere led to *stasis*, see Finley, “Fifth-Century Athenian Empire,” and *Politics*, esp. 111; Meiggs, *Athenian Empire*, 255–72, discusses the mechanics of imperial revenue.

stitutional stability. Social stability is maintained by appearances (a moderate style of life), rather than by realities. Inequalities in wealth persist in fact, but they are rendered less noxious by a strict code of social behavior.

Thucydides specifically states that it was their stable *politeia* that made the Spartans powerful (*dunamēnoi*, 1.18.1). Indeed, they were “preeminent in respect to *dunamis*” at the time of the Persian Wars, (1.18.2). But shortly after the Persian Wars it became apparent that there were two Greek states that were “self-evidently greatest in respect to *dunamis*”: Athens, the state that commanded each of the prerequisites of a great Greek coastal power (men, fortifications, capital, navy), was strongest at sea. Sparta, with its stable constitutional and internal social order, was strongest by land (1.18.2). Furthermore, these two powers spent most of the half-century after the Persian Wars fighting minor engagements against one another and their respective proxies. As a result, at the time of the outbreak of the great Peloponnesian War, both sides were highly prepared for war and well experienced in its dangers (1.18.3). Thucydides’ premises about the several sources of power and its relationship to expansionism lead the reader to expect that the conflict will be not only great but potentially destructive to the internal stability of powerful states and to the autonomy of weaker ones.²⁸

The close relationship Thucydides draws between state power and the structures of internal constitutional and social order is significant for reading his text as critical of popular rule. The two most common terms for power in fifth-century Athens were *dunamis* (power as instrument: national financial or military strength relative to other states) and *kratos*. For most ordinary Athenians, *kratos*, at least in the political context defined by *dēmokratia*, had the positive sense of “power as legitimate authority.” The demos’ *kratos*, the people’s political power, was regarded as a natural political good. But in Thucydides’ much darker vision, *kratos* is the violent flip-side of *dunamis*: either raw military might, or the forceful measures by which control over others is gained.²⁹ The Athenian demos was powerful because the common people were many and were well aware of their collective strength. If the *kratos* of the demos is a sort of power over others, and if the will to use power as an instrument to achieve greatness can destroy others’ freedom and contributes to civil strife, the implication must be that, for Thucydides, *dēmokratia* implied the potential power of

²⁸ It is important to keep in mind that Thucydides’ treatment of *democratic* power is closely associated with his attempt to understand power per se, and its relationship to human behavior, rationality, and suffering. The close association of power with irrationality and suffering informs readings of Thucydides as a pessimistic writer; see Stahl, *Thucydides*; Immerwahr, “Pathology”; Pouncey, *Necessities*; Flory, “Thucydides’ Hypotheses.” Connor (*Thucydides*, 29–31) points out that at 1.23.1–3, the greatness of the war is redefined in terms of the greatness of suffering.

²⁹ The positive, demotic, marking of *kratos* as a middle ground between despotism and anarchy is well expressed by Aeschylus *Eumenides* 526–30; cf. Meier, *Discovery*, 112–13. *Kratos* (in Thucydides) as domination: 1.143.4, 4.98.2, 8.46.1, 8.76.4; the strength to carry out a war: 3.13.7; violent means used to take a city: 1.64.3. For other examples, see Bétant, *Lexicon*, s.v. On other terms for power and empire in Thucydides, esp. *hēgemonia*, *archē*, *dunamis*, see Immerwahr, “Pathology,” 18–21; Wickersham *Hegemony*, 31–79.

the demos to destroy the freedom of others. *Dēmokratia* therefore embodied an innate capacity to degenerate into *stasis*. Under what circumstances might that capacity be realized?

As a “model 2” great state, Athens’ power was predicated upon overseas expansionism conjoined with the local military security provided by massive city walls. Athens’ rise to power, its constitution, and its attendant social order, unlike those of Sparta, were all of relatively recent origin; Athens had ascended to the status of a major naval-imperial power only during and after the Persian Wars. The post-Persian War history of the Aegean world (sketched by Thucydides at 1.89–117) suggested that Athenian *dēmokratia* entailed the simultaneous consolidation of the internal power of the demos qua “non-elite citizens” over the traditional Athenian elites (e.g., by the use of ostracism) and the external power of the Athenian demos qua citizen body over many other Greek peoples. That double consolidation had enabled Athens to rise with remarkable speed, and ultimately to rival in prestige the old and stable land power in the Peloponnesus.³⁰

Thucydides’ account of Athenian preparedness in book 1 and the first part of book 2 leads the reader to suppose that Athens stands in a remarkably strong position at the outbreak of the war.³¹ But how well tested was Athens really? How would the closely interwoven Athenian political, social, and imperial orders weather the storms of a war of unprecedented length and ferocity? Would the Athenian demos prove capable of consistently assessing the novel and ever-changing material and political situations accurately, and thereby deploy the instrumentalities of power wisely over time? This would depend—per Thucydides’ methodological introduction—in part upon the sources of information and methods of testing for truth-value employed by the decision-making Assembly. It would also depend upon the Athenian reactions to the unforeseen circumstances, the accidents of war, that would inevitably arise (e.g., 2.11.4). And those reactions would be conditioned by a complex interrelationship between contingent social and political conditions with the behavioral tendencies innate in human nature.

A.3. *Human Nature: Individual and Collective Interests*

The claim of Thucydides’ historical narrative to teach its readers how to understand the future (in political terms) is predicated on an essentially stable underlying human nature (*to anthrōpinon*, 1.22.4).³² Thucydides assumes throughout that humans will, by nature, act according to perceived self-interest. This may,

³⁰ For an account of how the institution of democracy facilitates this quick rise to power, see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 62–69, and “Revolution Matters.”

³¹ See further Connor, *Thucydides*, 33–34; Ober, “Thucydides Theoretikos.”

³² See, e.g., Reinhold, “Human Nature as a Cause”; Pouncey *Necessities of War*, xi; Thucydides’ “assumption is that human nature remains relatively constant.” But contrast Flory, “Thucydides’ Hypotheses,” 43–56; Farrar *Origins*, 135–37, 139, claiming that Thucydides’ view of human nature is not static or rigid.

but does not *necessarily*, mean narrowly selfish personal or individual interest. If it was human nature to seek advantage, that might often mean active cooperation; indeed, the degree to which individuals did act in narrowly personal self-interest alone was inversely proportional to state strength: because the wealthier individuals among the Spartans were able to suppress the impulse to individual aggrandizement, their polis flourished. Meanwhile, the tyrants who ruled many other early Greek poleis worked for the good of their families, and their poleis therefore achieved relatively little. Thucydides seems to regard the final step toward selfishly individualistic behavior—the circumstance in which each individual acts to further only his own personal interests as an individual—as a pathological extreme. In plague-stricken Athens, for example, while some persons continued to act honorably, in many cases the ordinary bonds of family, community, and friendship were shattered by a force beyond human ability to control or comprehend; the ordinary constraints of religious ritual, social propriety, family loyalty, and proper treatment of the dead were ignored. Thucydides' description of the hedonistic behavior of individual Athenians who had contracted the plague (or feared that they would) might be read as an explanation of how human nature (*phusis*) asserted itself in a condition free of the artificial restraints of law and social custom (*nomos*).³³ But Thucydides claims that the effect of the plague on individuals was “scarcely possible for human nature (*chalepōterōs ē kata tēn anthrōpeian phusin*) to endure” (2.50.1).³⁴ Thus, we are entitled to suppose that the plague overcame humanity in some persons and that the behavior of the plague-stricken often went beyond the realm of the natural. The plague narrative describes the ghastly end-point of a continuum of behavior whose middle range is, for Thucydides, “human nature.” For Thucydides, the selves that naturally act to further their perceived interests are collectivities: poleis or groups within the polis.³⁵ The stress of horrible circumstances has the *potential* to fragment society so that individuals act only to further individual self-interest, but life under those conditions is not fully human.

Under less stressful conditions, Thucydides' narrative suggests, the actors and selves whose interests will be served by the dictates of human nature are corporate entities. The opposite extreme of hyperindividualism would be humankind acting as a whole in its own collective interests. But Thucydides never

³³ Late-fifth- and fourth-century Athenian political writers were very interested in the distinction between that which is “natural” (*phusis*) and that which is a product of human society (*nomos*); the distinction was particularly important to the so-called Sophists. See Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty*, 260–73, and “*Nomos and phusis*”; cf. below, 3.C.1, 4.C.3. Because I do not suppose that Thucydides was a methodological individualist, I cannot agree with Pouncey (*Necessities of War*, xii) that Thucydides' view is that in times of crisis (e.g., *stasis*), human nature is “tracked to its proper ground in the human individual.”

³⁴ On this passage, see esp. Farrar, *Origins*, 136–37.

³⁵ Plague and individual selfishness: 2.53. Contrast 2.51: examples of selfless care of others. On Thucydides' emphasis on political groups rather than individuals, see Pope, “Thucydides and Democracy.” The upshot is that, for Thucydides, humans will ordinarily understand and seek to explain their own advantage within the frame of group (*oikos*, faction, polis) advantage; see below, esp. 2.E.1.

hints at this sort of universalism, even as a desirable ideal. Rather, the text's implied contrast to the hyperindividualism of the plague narrative is the condition in which all of the citizens of a polis act collectively in the interests of the polis as a whole. This ideal relationship between *politai* and polis, citizenry and state, is implied by much of the ordinary political language used by classical Greeks.³⁶ When an Athenian said that "the Athenians" made an alliance with another state, or when a public decree proclaimed that "the demos of the Athenians" decided to sail against the enemies of Athens, the ideological underpinning was an assumption of communal action for the common, unitary, national good. In reality, of course, the decision was made and carried out by a much smaller group; the actual participants in making the decision or carrying out the action represent only a fraction of the total population implied by the language of the announcement. Indeed, critical witnesses like Ps.-Xenophon suggested that decisions made in the name of the corporate whole were in fact made by a minority acting deliberately to advance its own minority interest.

The demotic Athenian view of human nature was probably not so different from that of Thucydides, but Athenian civic ideology put a great deal of emphasis on the demos as a whole as the "self" that naturally acted to further human interests. The Athenian political ideal was for all of the citizens to decide and to act collectively in the interests of the polis as a whole.³⁷ In Athens, the discontinuity between actual political actors (those who attended the Assembly, made proposals, served as jurors, implemented decisions, and so on) and the corporate whole (*hoi Athēnaioi*) was obscured by the elaborate language of democratic politics. The Athenian governmental and social orders were predicated on synecdoche: the part of the citizen body that made policy in the Assembly stood in the place of the whole polis. For the Athenians, a decree enacted in Assembly represented the collective will of Demos.³⁸ As such, the decree was construed (in Athenian ideology) as an expression of the interest of the state as a whole. Thucydides' text goes well beyond Ps.-Xenophon's in exposing this construal as a fragile political myth by seeking to demonstrate the existence and function of much narrower interests that were ordinarily concealed by the language of Athenian politics. His text suggests that, under the stress of war, the myth of Demos often broke down and that, in light of the majoritarian decision-making mechanisms of the democratic state, this had serious consequences: Athenian political life after the death of Pericles is depicted as tending toward the selfish extreme typified by poleis beset by tyrants or plague. Alternately, the myth of unity was from time to time revived during the war, and Thucydides suggests that the consequences of this revival were even more destructive to the polis in the long run.

³⁶ Pope, "Thucydides and Democracy."

³⁷ Athenian ideal of consensus (*homonoia*): Funke, *Homonoia*; Ober, *Mass*, 295–99. Thucydides uses *homonoia* and its verbal form (*homonoiein*) only once each (8.93.3, 8.75.2, respectively), both times in highly charged political contexts associated with the reestablishment of democracy.

³⁸ "Capital-D Demos": above, 1.B.4.

A.4. *Stasis at Epidamnus*

When used by Thucydides in a “factional” sense, *ho dēmos* is contrasted with *hoi dunatoi* (the chief, influential, or powerful men).³⁹ The significance of Thucydides’ use of the word “demos” to refer to “a faction that acts, according to the ordinary dictates of human nature, to further its own selfish interests” is clarified by an assessment of the first use of “demos” in the text. The context, the *stasis* in the “great and populous *dunamis*” of Epidamnus, is highly privileged in that it begins Thucydides’ historical narrative proper. The Epidamnian civil conflict seems to have broken out in the course of a war against the local barbarians, although Thucydides remains somewhat uncertain about this (indicated by the phrase “it is said” [*hōs legetai*], 1.24.4). But he is clear enough on the central event: “Just before the [Peloponnesian] war” (thus within the domain of accurately knowable affairs), the demos of Epidamnus expelled *hoi dunatoi*. This expulsion is, in a sense, the first certain historical fact recorded in the text. The passage describing the Epidamnian *stasis* comes just after the end of the methodological introduction, at the very beginning of the narrative of the war’s precipitating factors (*aitiai*). Furthermore, the internal conflict at Epidamnus was extremely important in its effects; it precipitated the chain of events that led directly to the first, and most fully described, *aitia* of the war.⁴⁰ In this key passage, the reader is presented with a polis, described as “a great and populous power,” that, as a result of a difficult external war, is racked by civil conflict between the many/demos and “the powerful.” This pattern recurs in a sort of progressive ripple effect throughout Thucydides’ narrative and informs his critical project.

Having been driven out, “the powerful” Epidamnians made common cause with the local barbarians, and piratically raided Epidamnus by land and sea (1.24.5). Thucydides’ ideal reader’s sympathies are hardly likely to lie with the Epidamnian *dunatoi* at this point—Thucydides has already remarked that piratical activity by land and sea was once common, and was no source of shame, among the *primitive* Greeks and *barbarians*, and that piracy was one cause of the weakness and instability of early Greek societies (1.5).⁴¹ Thus, if Thucydides intended the affairs of Epidamnus to serve as an introductory historical example that will demonstrate the practical application of the premises sketched in his introductory paragraphs, we are not encouraged to suppose that his political preference is for a narrow oligarchy of the sort that would result from the victory of *hoi dunatoi*. But nor does the other side in this conflict offer a paradigm of the sort of behavior likely to conduce to the maintenance of state greatness. Pressed by the raids of “the powerful,” the Epidamnian demos called

³⁹ Other examples of *dēmos* vs. *dunatoi* in Thucydides: 2.65.2, 3.47.3, 5.4.3, 8.21, 8.73.2, 8.90.1.

⁴⁰ Cf. 1.146: the war arose immediately (*arxamenai euthus*) from the affairs of Epidamnus and Corcyra. Bowie (“Beginnings,” 142–46) demonstrates that the Epidamnian narrative not only “provided a paradigmatic case of historical processes outlined in the ‘Archaeology,’” but also manifests strong structural similarities to the opening scene of Homer’s *Iliad*.

⁴¹ The leaders of these early pirates are described as *ou tōn adunatōtatōn*, 1.5.1.

upon interested foreign powers for aid, first Corcyra, then Corinth. This action ultimately leads to the city of Epidamnus being successfully besieged by the Corcyraeans (1.24–29), followed by a massacre of Corcyraean opponents, carried out in defiance of formal promises (1.29.5–30.1). Although we are not informed of its final destiny, it is clear that as a result of the war, Epidamnus fell from the position of a “great power” to the level of a pawn in the games of greater powers—just as those greater powers will later become pawns in the hands of the greatest Greek powers, Athens and Sparta.

The sad history of once-great Epidamnus links *stasis* between mass and elite with self-interested interference by more powerful states in the affairs of lesser powers. Interference by the more powerful states leads to loss of freedom, and so factionalism helps to actualize the destructiveness inherent in the possession of power. The *dunamis* of Epidamnus is doomed because each of the two internal sociopolitical factions, *demos* and *dunatoi*, chose its course of action on the basis of a selfish assessment of its own short-term advantage, rather than looking toward the likely future effect of its actions on the polis as a unitary community. The “humanly natural” tendency to act in accordance with self-interest is thus shown as leading to the unleashing of destructive powers, at least when the “self” whose interests are being advanced is identified as a social faction.

This model is considerably elaborated and the methods of civil warriors are detailed in Thucydides’ justly famous description of the ugly civil war at Corcyra in book 3 (69–85). Here, the important polis of Corcyra, the initial beneficiary of the Epidamnian *stasis*, is itself torn asunder in a battle between the *demos* and the wealthier class of Corcyraeans. True to the Epidamnian example, the Corcyraean *demos* looks for aid from a more powerful outside power; this time it is democratic Athens. The Corcyraean oligarchs, for their part, seek help from the Peloponnesians. The interference of outside superpowers adds to the carnage of *stasis*, and, like Epidamnus, Corcyra is consumed. Although Thucydides’ unfinished text leaves the issue of the final wave of the ripple effect in suspense, the attentive reader is led to complete the escalating chain of events for herself: Class conflict in great Epidamnus led to intervention by greater Corcyra, and conflict in Corcyra led to intervention by Athens. Surely it is easy enough to extend the pattern one step further and to imagine that the greatest states of the age will be subject to exactly the same internal pressures as Epidamnus and Corcyra were. If social classes in the greatest poleis were to give in to the temptation to engage in self-interested civil conflict, we should imagine that the resulting conflict would be commensurately awful. Sparta, with its legendary constitutional and social stability, might hope to survive that scenario. Would the same be true of democratic Athens?

If the Epidamnian model is applied to Athens, the likely outcome seems clear: Athens is a great and populous *dunamis*, ruled by the *demos* but with a significant population of “powerful men.” For an ordinary Athenian, the term *dēmokratia* meant something like “the monopoly over legitimate public authority is held by the whole of the citizenry.” The analysis of *stasis* here suggests that for Thucydides, the same term denoted something like “the lower classes

possess the raw power that gives them the means to constrain the rest of us.” Thucydides does sometimes use the term “demos” to refer to the abstraction “citizenry,” but, like Ps.-Xenophon and other critics, he uses the term primarily to denote a large, sociologically defined, and self-interested political faction within the state. “Demos” in this narrower sense means, as we have seen, “the mass of the poor” and is equated with *to plēthos* and *hoi polloi*.⁴² This sociological definition had ultimately led Ps.-Xenophon to *aporia*, but within Thucydides’ historical vision *dēmokratia* is reenvisioned as an unstable system likely to promote the spread of destructive, narrowly defined self-interest, and this instability will unleash the great destructive potential innate in the *dunameis* of both Athens and Sparta—and eventually of non-Hellenic powers, like Persia, as well. If democracy is to achieve a long-term stability (within the structure of Thucydides’ argument), the demos of Athens must not be just “the many” imagining themselves as Demos, but “the many and the few united in fact.” Moreover, that unified demos must have an accurate understanding of the effect of its present decisions and actions on the future circumstances of the polis as a whole. This second condition requires that public decisions be grounded in objective facts. In practice, the Athenian demos is depicted in Thucydides’ text as tending to act selfishly in the narrow interest of “the many,” and as making decisions on the basis of highly misleading speeches delivered by personally selfish and self-interested parties. Thucydides’ first detailed description of how the Athenian demos interpreted and acted upon what they heard in public speeches follows directly from the sequence of events involving Epidamnus.

B. JUSTICE AND INTEREST I: THE CORCYRA/CORINTH DEBATE

Thucydides informs his reader that in the years prior to the Peloponnesian War (in the mid-430s B.C.), the Corcyraeans—whose island-polis occupied a highly strategic location off Greece’s northwestern coast and on the route to southern Italy—were wealthy and powerful (*ouk adunatoi*) as a result of having a large navy (1.25.4). It was their naval victory over Corinth at Epidamnus that led the Corcyraeans to deploy (and ultimately to overextend) their power by attacking states in the region friendly to Corinth (1.30.2). The Corinthians responded by putting together an alliance of minor sea-powers and preparing to launch a punitive expedition against Corcyra. At this juncture, the Corcyraeans realized they were in over their heads and requested an alliance with Athens. The Corinthians strongly opposed the formation of a Corcyra-Athens alliance, on the grounds that it would be a breach of a treaty between Athens and the Peloponnesian League. The Corcyraeans and Corinthians each sent ambassadors to Athens, and consequently “an Assembly was called, and the parties to the dis-

⁴² Sealey (“Origins,” 283–90) unsuccessfully (in my view) attempts to show that “demos” in Thucydides has no class meaning.

pute came forward” (*katastasēs de ekklēsiās es antilogian ēlthon*, 1.31.4). Thucydides presents their respective speeches.⁴³

The paired orations of the Corcyraeans and Corinthians are not only the first of the three Athenian Assembly debates offered by Thucydides, they are the first speeches of any sort in his text. Like the Epidamnian *stasis*, which is the first historical narrative proper, the competing speeches of the Corcyraeans and Corinthians may be taken as representing an “ideal type.” The speech pair offers a powerful practical example of the general principles presented in the methodological introduction. The word used by Thucydides for the dispute, *antilogia*, reveals that the speakers will take diametrically opposed positions. By implication, there is seemingly no possibility of a genuine compromise in this dispute; either the Athenians make an alliance with Corcyra or they don’t—the eventual outcome (a limited defensive alliance) is not discussed by the disputants. Moreover, only anonymous ambassadors, “the Corinthians” and “the Corcyraeans,” are mentioned as speakers. The self-interest (the “selves” here being the states of Corinth or Corcyra) of the speakers is evident. Each speaker deploys various rhetorical tactics in an attempt to persuade the Athenian audience. In this case, there can be no question of reading Assembly debate as a variation of disinterested dialectical reasoning. This is not a case of public-spirited citizen-speakers who share a concern for Athens’ best interests, engaged in deliberation over policy options and thus offering an intelligent audience the chance to enact sound policy on the basis of a tolerably accurate grasp of the relevant circumstances. Since Thucydides presents only the speeches of the disputants themselves, the reader is led to imagine that it is primarily on the basis of speeches delivered by foreigners looking to their own states’ interest that the Athenians will have to make this extremely important decision. The question Thucydides implicitly poses is this: Can the mass audience that is the Athenian demos gathered in Assembly derive right policy (that is, a correct assessment of the relationship between present action and future advantage) from the rhetoric presented by Assembly speakers? It will certainly not be an easy task. Thucydides has already pointed out that he himself found that it required a great deal of work to extract a true account from informants whose *logoi* were twisted by the influence of preference (*eunoia*) for one side or the other (1.22.3).

The first word in the Corcyraeans’ speech is the abstraction “the just” (*dikaion*), but their appeal is explicitly aimed at Athenian self-interest: the Corcyraeans state that they know that they will fail in their goal if they do not clearly establish (*saphes katastēsousi*) that the alliance will be advantageous (*xumphora*) for Athens and that the reciprocal gratitude (*charis*) of the Corcyraeans will be secure (*bebaion*, 1.32.1). The linchpin of the Corcyraean argument is that the addition of Corcyra’s *dunamis* (specifically the naval force) to

⁴³ The speeches of the ambassadors would have been preceded by an authorizing decree of the Assembly (Aeschin. 2.58). Cogan, *Human Thing*, 8–20, and Crane, “Power, Prestige,” offer insightful analyses of the speech pair.

that of Athens will make Athens more powerful and better able to resist enemies (esp. 1.33.2, 1.36.5). Thus the Corcyraean argument is explicitly based on precisely those factors that Thucydides' history attempts to elucidate: power and human nature as motivated by self-interest.

In order to make their interest- and power-based argument, the Corcyraeans must instruct the audience on several general principles that determine advantage in inter-state conduct: It is always better to take the initiative (1.33.4); the fewer concessions one makes, the greater one's own safety (1.34.3); allying with a state whose enemies are the same as one's own will bring great advantage (1.35.5)—this last is described as the “securest possible assurance” (*saphestatē pistis*). The Corcyraeans also discuss the effects of making, or not making, the alliance on the probable course of the future: they confidently predict that there will be a war—those Athenians who do not think so “err in their reasoning” (*gnōmēs hamartanei*) since they fail to realize, first, that the Spartans “are being impelled to war by fear of you” (*phobōi tōi humeterōi polemseiontas*), and second, that the Corinthians, “who hate you,” are a powerful influence on the Spartans (1.33.3). If the Athenians do ally with Corcyra, this show of strength “will cause your enemies to be more fearful” (*tous enantious mallon phobēsan*) and correspondingly less eager to launch an attack. You Athenians “will not be showing much forethought” (*ou ta kratista autais pronoōn*) if, “while on the lookout for a war that is surely coming, indeed is virtually upon you” (*es ton mellonta kai hoson ou paronta polemon to autika periskopōn*), you give up a Corcyra with its key geographic location (1.36.1).

The Corcyraeans thus claim to be able to instruct the Athenians, in interpretive principles and facts alike, through speech. But will they be good teachers? The sympathetic reader of Thucydides' text (i.e., the reader who believes that the text as a whole may indeed be “useful” in helping her “genuinely to understand . . . the past and . . . the future,” per 1.22.4) may hope to answer this question by looking at the coherence of the argument itself, by comparing the conformity of the Corcyraean prescription to the general principles previously established by Thucydides when writing in propria persona, and by comparing the Corcyraeans' predictions with “the facts themselves” as revealed in Thucydides' narrative of the war. Viewed from this critical perspective, the Corcyraeans' discussion of their own history raises immediate doubts about their qualifications as instructors in the proper conduct of international affairs: they admit that a policy of nonalliance, which formerly had appeared to them to be sober and moderate, now appears foolish and unsafe (*hē dokousa hēmōn proteron sōphrosunē . . . nun aboulia kai astheneia phainomenē*, 1.32.4). And thus, they intend to change their policy, since it seems that their stance of neutrality was in error (*doxēs de mallon hamartiai tēi proteron apragmosunēi*, 1.32.5). The Corcyraeans were caught in this tangle of error, appearance, and false assumption because they failed to see that their *dunamis*, which seemed truly great when they went against the Corinthians one-on-one, was only relatively great, and that they would become relatively powerless (*adunatoi*: 1.32.5) when

faced with a Corinthian alliance. This is a pretty elementary blunder for would-be instructors in the art of diplomacy.⁴⁴

The Corcyraeans are not complete fools, nor are they completely misled about the likely future: they correctly predict the coming war. And they correctly (from the point of view of Thucydides in *propria persona*) identify the prime cause of the war as Spartan fear (*phobos*) of Athenian power. But were they correct in telling the Athenians that the war was for all intents and purposes already upon them? This brings up the issue, much debated by modern scholars, of the causes of the war, and the relationship between what Thucydides says was the “truest but least apparent” cause (*prophasis*: growth of Athenian power leading to Spartan fear, 1.23.6) and the “apparent” causes (*aitiai*), among which the Corcyraean alliance itself is the most important (1.146).⁴⁵ Without entering into the debate, it seems fair to say that Thucydides’ text as a whole encourages the reader to feel that the Corcyraeans have seriously overstated the war’s proximity (the Spartans will require a good deal of persuading before they declare war, 1.66–88). One might go so far as to suggest that Athens’ making of the defensive alliance (evidently because they were persuaded by the Corcyraeans, 1.44) was the act that fulfilled the Corcyraean prophecy: Spartan fear of Athenian power is what makes the war inevitable, and the Corcyraeans confidently state that the alliance will both make Athens more powerful and make Athens’ enemies *more* fearful. Absent the alliance, would Spartan fears have been sufficiently inflamed to precipitate the war? We cannot know—but nor could the Corcyraeans. In any event, Thucydides’ narrative will make it very clear that the Corcyraeans have certainly overstated the security advantages that will accrue to both Athens and Corcyra as a result of an alliance. The confident prediction that the alliance will add substantially to Athenian strength “without risk or expense” (*aneu kindunōn kai dapanēs*: 1.33.2) is falsified by the narrative: the Corcyraean navy plays no significant role in a war that the narrative reveals as entailing vast risk and expense for Athens and, in the end, destroying Corcyra in a nightmarish *stasis*.⁴⁶

The Corcyraeans warn the Athenians not to fall into the clever verbal traps that the Corinthians will set for them (1.34.3); but is the speech of the Corinthians really any worse (or better) as an example of “instruction by speech”? The first word spoken by the Corinthians is the abstraction “necessity” (*anankaion*, 1.37.1), but they use the term only to introduce the centrality of the

⁴⁴ Cf. Thucydides’ (1.25.4) own assessment of the Corcyraeans, in which, although they are called “powerful” (*ouk adunatoi*), the implication is that they think rather too much of their own wealth and strength.

⁴⁵ On the much-disputed issue of the causes of the war, Ste. Croix (*Origins*) remains fundamental, although he occasionally stretches credulity in attempting to exculpate Athens from all responsibility. On the Corcyra affair, see *ibid.*, 66–79, arguing that the cause of the problem was the “insane” aggressiveness of the Corinthians toward the Corcyraeans. King, “Herodotus,” offers a good discussion of the mid-fifth-century shift in the meaning of *aitia* from blame/responsibility to “scientific cause.”

⁴⁶ The irrelevance of the Corcyraean navy in the rest of the narrative: Gomme, in *HCT* 1: 168.

issue of justice; their argument is concerned with interest and power, but they see interest and power as grounded less on gaining secure access to material necessities (ships, walls, capital) than on abstract notions of justice. The Corinthians employ a terminology of appearance, error, prediction, and word/fact, which has already become familiar to Thucydides' readers from his methodological introduction, but these terms tend to take on a moral coloration in the Corinthian speech.⁴⁷ A notable example is the Corinthian response to the Corcyraeans' claim that the latter had offered to submit the dispute to third-party arbitration. The Corinthians assert that arbitration is impossible if one side, having already grabbed an unfair advantage, seeks to negotiate from a position of security. Arbitration is only possible if, before embarking on the contest of arms, there exists an equality in fact as well as in words (*ton es isonta te erga homoiōs kai tous logous prin diagōnizesthai kathistanta*, 1.39.1). The Corinthians are making the familiar contrast between *erga* and *logoi*, but the "fact" they allude to is not so much equality of power, but an equal standing in relation to justice.

Although they start from rather different premises, the Corinthians, like the Corcyraeans, claim to instruct their Athenian audience in general principles of international relations: an overmastering desire for victory makes people forget their true interests (1.41.2–3); it is most beneficial to do wrong as seldom as possible (1.42.2); the power that deals fairly with equals finds truer security than one that snatches temporary advantage (1.42.4). And, once again like the Corcyraeans, the Corinthians claim to be able to predict the future course of events: If the Athenians establish the principle that it is acceptable for subjects in revolt to make new alliances at will, Athens will face revolts among its own subjects (1.40.6). If the Athenians look at the matter from a sober and serious perspective (*sōphronousi*), they will see that the alliance with Corcyra will bring war, not peace (1.40.2). The Corcyraeans are just trying to scare you Athenians about the coming war, and it is unclear (*aphanēs*) when or whether there will be a war (1.42.2).

Put to the test of Thucydides's own stated methodological principles and narrative, the Corinthians, like the Corcyraeans, end up with a mixed scorecard as instructors. They are certainly right in that, with the alliance made, the war came about, states subject to Athens sought to make alliances with the Spartans, and this proved to be a terrible problem for the Athenians. But what of their prediction about the inevitability of war? Here the reader is invited to reconsider an important question first raised by the Corcyraeans: What Athenian actions are likely to precipitate conflict with Sparta? Albeit Athens *did* make an alliance, and there *was* a war. But did the alliance *cause* the war, or is this

⁴⁷ E.g., 1.38.5, where the verb *hamartanō* means something like "to act unjustly" rather than (as it is usually used by both Thucydides and the Corcyraeans) "to err." The Corinthian perspective is absurd if one imagines (with, e.g., Dahl, *Democracy*, 23) the world of inter-polis relations to exist in a strong Realist state of anarchy (or Hobbesian state of nature) characterized by violence rather than by law; see, however, Sheets ("Conceptualizing"), who argues (against Ste. Croix) that the Corinthian position was in fact squarely based in traditions of Greek "international law."

fallacious post hoc ergo propter hoc reasoning? The Corinthians imply that there is a causal relationship, and that if no alliance is struck, it will remain at least “unclear” that there will be a war. But, as we have seen, there is no way to prove or disprove this assessment. Thucydides in propria persona states (1.23.6) that it was Spartan fear at the growth of Athenian power that necessarily led to (*anankasai*) the outbreak of the war. As we have seen, the alliance might have led the Spartans to become more frightened because of the *apparent* augmentation of Athenian power, but the alliance with Corcyra did not, in the event, make Athens any stronger in an absolute sense.⁴⁸ In attempting to weigh the relative merits of the Corcyraean and Corinthian arguments for causation, the reader is forcefully reminded of how difficult it really is to grasp and to explain exactly what factors actually cause great historical events. The complexity and sophistication of Thucydides’ own analysis contrast sharply with the simplistic causal explanations of both parties to the dispute. If the Corinthians were correct in their claim that the alliance in and of itself would automatically lead to war, Thucydides’ claim that power and fear were the “least apparent” causes would be unnecessary; his contrast of the hidden to the overt causes (which include the Corcyraean affair) would become incoherent, and his long excursus (1.89–117) on the Pentecontaetia would be mere antiquarianism. Thus, it appears that, assuming Thucydides’ difficult text, with its intermixture of methodological principles and historical description, is a good teacher about “the past and future,” then the Corinthians, like the Corcyraeans, are inadequate instructors, at least when it comes to the key issue of the probability of war.

Yet both the Corcyraean and the Corinthian speeches share some of Thucydides’ implicit assumptions about the importance of power and self-interest. Like Thucydides, both sides propose general rules for inter-state relations, and both sides claim to be able to assess future probabilities. Furthermore, much of the terminology of knowledge, inference, appearance, establishment, error, power, interest, security, and prediction employed by Thucydides in this methodological introduction (1.1–23) is mirrored in one or both of the two speeches.⁴⁹ The speakers thus claim to do just what Thucydides claims that his text will do: teach about interest and power, and offer an understanding of past events and the probable course of the future.

As we have seen, in the methodological introduction, Thucydides explicitly contrasts his own project with that of the poets and *logographoi*, and he has cast doubt on competing *logoi* as reliable conduits to reality. Thus, it seems a reasonable inference to posit that in these, the first speeches in the text, the historian is intentionally contrasting his own critical-historical approach to accurately understanding past and future with the rhetorical approaches to understanding employed in the Athenian Assembly. The implied contrast is not black

⁴⁸ It may, on the other hand, have *prevented* the Peloponnesians from augmenting their own naval resources, but that would seem more likely to provoke frustration than fear. See further Ste. Croix, *Origins*, 66–79.

⁴⁹ E.g., *saphes*, *skopeō*, *dokeō*, *phainetai*, *sōphrōn*, *tekmērion*, *sēmeion*, *hamartanō*, *katastasis* (and its verbal forms), *logos* vs. *ergon*, *dunamis*, *xumpheron*, *mellonta*, *bebaios*.

and white: individual points made in each speech are confirmed by Thucydides' historical narrative. Thus, Thucydides is not claiming that "makers of speeches always lie," or that "they are consistently wrong in their understanding of present realities and future possibilities." Rather, Thucydides shows that a given speech will probably be a mishmash of truths, half-truths, distortions, and outright errors or lies. Why must this be the case? And what are the implications of this position?

It must be the case (according to Thucydides' logic), first, because establishing the truth is not easy: Thucydides has emphasized how much labor his historical investigations entailed. Next, Thucydides claims that any proper understanding of reality must be based on a close correspondence between verbal descriptions and the relevant objective facts. Such an objective stance is incompatible with the competitive environment of a contest for the approval of an uncritical and pleasure-loving audience (1.21.1). Speakers of public orations were inevitably involved in a contest for their audience's favor; they could not afford to make the issue seem too difficult for a given audience to comprehend within the narrow time constraints imposed by an oral presentation. And finally, speakers were ordinarily interested parties, and thus they viewed and described the world from a predetermined and biased perspective. Even if a given speaker were able to see and understand "the facts themselves," he was unlikely to present these facts impartially, because he hoped to influence the audience to vote in his favor.

The audience, for its part, is presented with a mix of fact and falsehood in each speech. Because the members of the audience (in this case) are Athenian Assemblymen, they judge (that is to say, assess the effect of past and current realities on future possibilities), they vote, and by voting they determine state policy, largely on the basis of the competing views of reality presented in the speeches they have heard. How are the Assemblymen to separate truth from falsehood? How are they to determine whether their collective interest (either their "factional" interest as *hoi polloi*, or their public interest as *hoi politai*) and the speaker's particular interests are congruent or where and how those interests diverge? Thucydides' answer seems to be, "Left to their own devices, they can't." The citizen masses are unable to determine truth consistently and accurately or to determine congruity of interest by listening to speeches because they have no reliable method of testing for either quality. Thucydides' implicit lesson is that democratic knowledge does not provide an adequate grounding for assessing the truth-value of rhetorical discourse. And thus, badly—or at best indifferently—instructed by speech, the Athenian Assembly was likely eventually to fall into error and, as a result, to make bad policy. Serious policy errors may not result from the decisions made in any given Assembly. But, given the nature of the decision-making process, there is a very high likelihood that eventually mistakes will be made. By contrasting his own critical-historical approach to gaining knowledge of past and future with the rhetoric of ideal-type public speakers, Thucydides has established for his reader the existence of a potentially fatal structural flaw in the edifice of democratic ways of knowing

and doing. The identification of this “flaw” is a key to his criticism of Athenian popular rule.

The outcome of the Corcyraean/Corinthian debate was initially ambiguous. At the first of the two Assemblies held to discuss the possible alliance, the tendency was for the Assemblymen not to underrate the force of the Corinthian *logoi*; but at a second meeting, the Assemblymen’s mood changed (*metegnōsan*). Thus they decided to make a limited defensive alliance with Corcyra (1.44.1). The reason for the decision was, we are told, the desire to have the Corcyraean navy on Athens’ side and the perceived (*ephaineto*) advantage of the geographic position of Corcyra on the route to Italy and Sicily, since “it appeared to them (*edokei . . . autois*) that there really would be a war with the Peloponnesians” (1.44.2 –3). Answering the question of whether the Assembly made the right decision in this case depends on how one interprets Thucydides’ discussion of the causes of the war. But in any event, it is clear (in light of the two Assemblies) that the *antilogia* had led to an initial phase of ambivalence and indecision among the Athenian Assemblymen.

C. LEADERSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC ATHENS

The stark contrast between Thucydidean analytical method and the Assembly rhetoric displayed by the Corcyraeans and Corinthians might lead the reader to suppose that Athens’ chances of making the right decisions in the coming war are slight. And yet that reader also knows that the war was long and hard-fought. The option of making a limited *defensive* alliance, ignored by the Corcyraean and Corinthian speakers and yet adopted by the Athenian Assembly, suggests an alternative source of sage policy. There is obviously some missing factor, some as yet cryptic element in the power equation, that will explain the Athenian rise to power and Athenian resilience in the conduct of the war. The missing factor is thoughtful political leadership. Thucydides’ description of the inter-state maneuvering that preceded the war is remarkable in its elision of individual Athenian speechmaking: the text offers only the most indirect hints that any Athenian spoke out to explain how Athenian interests would be affected by a Corcyraean alliance. The entity that ponders the problem, weighs its options, and ultimately decides on the issue is the collectivity, “the Athenians.” While this is constitutionally accurate, given Athens’ democratic government, it leaves out the vital role played in Assembly debates by the skilled citizen-speaker, the *rhētōr*.

C.1. Themistocles and the Value of Foresight

Thucydides’ reader is made aware of the essential role of leadership in democratic Athens in two passages focusing on the career of the Athenian statesman Themistocles. The first passage introduces Thucydides’ compressed narrative of the “Pentecontaetia,” the half-century between the Persian and Peloponnesian

wars. Here Thucydides describes how, after the Persian Wars, Themistocles contrived to rebuild Athens' city walls in the face of Spartan opposition and then to complete the long walls to Piraeus that had been begun, on his initiative, before the war.⁵⁰ Thucydides states that it was Themistocles who first dared to tell (*etolmēsen eipein*) the Athenians that their future greatness lay on the sea and that he thereby helped lay the foundation (*xunkateskeuazen*) of the Athenian empire (1.89–93).

The second passage is a remarkable and rhetorically elegant eulogy in which the historian expresses the strongest admiration of Themistocles' political abilities (1.138.3):⁵¹ Themistocles displayed a natural (*phuseōs*) genius, which distinguished him from others and made him most worthy of admiration. He possessed a "native acuteness" (*oikeiai gar xunesei*) that enabled him to be most potent (*kratistos*) at quickly forming conclusions without the need of detailed study either in advance or at the time, and his forecasts regarding future events were invariably the best (*aristos*). He had the capacity to explain any subject on which he was expert, and even on matters in which he remained an amateur (*apeiros*) he could form an adequate (*hikanōs*) judgment. He was particularly adept at assessing the hidden (*aphanēs*) opportunities and dangers of future circumstances. It was "by natural power of mind" (*phuseōs . . . dunamei*) and rapidity of action that he was supreme (*kratistos*) at doing exactly what needed to be accomplished.

Thucydides' Themistocles seems to possess the primary virtues that Thucydides' reader may hope to gain from a careful reading of the text—foresight, analytical acuity, ability to explain one's own reasoning—along with the capacity to act quickly and decisively on the basis of well-reasoned conclusions. Themistocles, however, possesses these capacities by innate talent. His "natural" (by *phusis*) and "native" (*oikeia*) gifts allowed him to avoid the arduous "study in advance [and] at the time" that Thucydides' methodological introduction suggests will be the prerequisite for gaining the ability to understand the meaning of past events and the general trends to be expected in a probable future. As Thucydides' account of Themistocles' activities in the *Pentecontaetia* makes clear, Themistocles was a major force in Athenian politics in the years after the Persian Wars, the very era in which, as Thucydides has previously explained, Athens rose to the position of being one of the two great Hellenic powers. The reader is thus led to suppose that Athens' precipitous rise to great power status was (at least in large measure) the fortuitous result of the presence of a leader who happened, apparently by a fluke of nature, to possess the necessary political skills. Those skills were not sufficient to allow Themistocles to retain his leadership position in Athens indefinitely; he was eventually ostracized (i.e., constitutionally expelled by popular vote without being legally

⁵⁰ Balot ("Genealogy of Greed," ch. 4) argues persuasively that Themistocles is linked to Athenian unity in the wall-building story (esp. 1.90–94) and that the sacrifice of individual assets for the defense of the polis anticipates Pericles' war strategy, which was also predicated on sacrifice for the good of the polis.

⁵¹ On the language of this passage, see Hornblower, *Thucydides*, 26–27.

convicted of a particular crime, 1.135.3) by the Athenians.⁵² Thucydides relates how, after being hounded from Greece by his enemies, Themistocles gained the respect of the Persian king and spent his last years as a minor grandee in the Persian empire (1.135–138.2). Quite obviously, then, Themistocles had not exhausted his reservoir of diplomatic talent at the time that the Athenians decided they had had enough of him, and he was quickly able to find other outlets for his abilities. Once again, a pattern of events that seemingly points to a serious weakness in the Athenian political system will be repeated in augmented form later in Thucydides' text.

C.2. *Pericles' First Assembly Speech*

The eulogy of Themistocles helps the reader to appreciate the essential political role played in Athenian government by the statesman Pericles, who seemingly shares Themistocles' many political virtues.⁵³ Pericles, who first appears in the narrative as a successful general during the inter-war period (commanding Athenian forces at Sicyon and Oeniadae [1.111.2–3], Euboea [1.114], and Samos [1.116–17]), is introduced to Thucydides's readers as a consistent opponent of the Spartans: "The most able man (*dunatōtatos*) of his era and leading figure of the *politeia*" (1.127.3). This uncompromising statement regarding Pericles' prominence is reflected in the structure of the text (Pericles' are the only speeches by Athenian politicians not countered or paired with opposing speeches) and quickly reiterated: The Spartans have sent a final ultimatum to Athens, demanding certain concessions on the penalty of war. The Athenians gather in Assembly to debate the matter and to decide once and for all whether to seek peace or accept war with the Peloponnesians. There was evidently sharply divided opinion among the citizenry: many people came forward to address the Assembly, some advocating and some rejecting compromise with the Spartans (1.139.3–4). But Thucydides offers the reader only a single speech on the matter. He reintroduces the speaker in now-familiar terms, "And among them there came up Pericles, son of Xanthippos, a man (*anēr*) who was at that time the foremost among the Athenians (*protos Athēnaiōn*), the most forceful (*dunatōtatos*) in speaking and in action, who spoke as follows."

Pericles begins his speech by asserting that his policy recommendations have been consistent over time and that he would now simply reiterate the advice he had previously given his fellow citizens.⁵⁴ After explaining that accommodation with a hostile Sparta was truly dangerous to Athenian interests and that such accommodation would amount to accepting a subordinate and slavish (1.141.1) stance, Pericles lays out in detail the material resources available to the two opposing sides. The Peloponnesians, he bluntly states, have no financial re-

⁵² The bibliography on ostracism is huge; see Thomsen, *Origin of Ostracism*; Forsdyke, "Exile," emphasizes its salient democratic features.

⁵³ On Themistocles as a proto-Pericles: Edmunds, *Chance*, 9–10; Hornblower, *Commentary*, 1: 223; Forde, *Ambition*, 69–70.

⁵⁴ Edmunds, *Chance*, 7–36, offers a detailed analysis of the speech.

serves and no significant naval forces. Thus they will engage in the war at a severe disadvantage. They are used to fighting only short, simple wars among themselves—the sorts of contest typical of impoverished people (1.141.1–3; cf. the Archaeology, 1.15). The Peloponnesians’ lack of the essential resources that (as we have seen) undergirded Athenian-style (imperial-naval) *dunamis* is exacerbated by the diffuse Spartan alliance structure. The Peloponnesian alliance is incapable of acting as a single entity, and thus, divided in their councils, the Peloponnesians tend to fritter away their opportunities (1.141.6). Pericles assures the Athenians that they need not be concerned for their security in the face of Spartan-led invasions of Attica because the invaders will not be able to construct fortifications capable of threatening Athens’ own massively fortified city-harbor complex (1.142.2–3).

The bulk of the speech expands on these central themes. Pericles argues that, having begun the war with inadequate reserves, the Peloponnesians will not easily be able to acquire capital surplus, nor will they easily develop a credible sea power. He explains that the Athenians will be completely secure as long as they preserve intact their citizen manpower and the overseas empire that is protected by the deployment of Athenian manpower through the instrumentalities of imperial treasure and sea power. Pericles’ strategy for the war entailed withdrawing Athens’ population from rural Attica (Athens’ home territory) behind the impregnable city walls. It also required refusing to meet the Peloponnesian infantry in open battle, since a major land battle in Attica would put Athenian manpower resources at risk (esp. 1.143.5).

The speech concludes with a rousing patriotic appeal to live up to the standards set by Athenians of the recent past. But before this peroration, Pericles introduces a note of caution: Athens must not engage in expansionist imperial adventures during the course of the war, “for I am more afraid of our native errors than of our enemies’ strategic plans” (*mallon gar pephobēmai tas oikeias hēmōn hamartias ē tas tōn enantiōn dianoias*, 1.144.1). The exposition of what this means is deferred: Pericles announces that this matter will be clarified (*dēlōthēsetai*) in another *logos*, when the time has come for *erga* (1.144.2). The Athenian Assemblymen must be content with that. But Thucydides’ reader has already been invited to ponder the problem of the likelihood that the Athenian Assemblymen will make serious mistakes and thereby will inaugurate bad policy. Now she learns that the Athenian capacity for error is “native” (*oikeia*). This is the same term that Thucydides had used to describe Themistocles’ “native” acuteness of mind.⁵⁵ The verbal echo suggests that there is an association to be made between an innate “general Athenian” capacity to err, and the innate genius of Athens’ two most prominent statesmen. By implication, as long as the inherently error-prone Athenians follow the advice and accept the leadership of inherently insightful men, all will be well. But absent wise leadership, the Athe-

⁵⁵ The term, with its root *oikos*, has associations of that which is the private property of a family/kinship group: MacDowell, “Oikos”; Foxhall, “Household”; use of *oikeios* in Thucydides: Bétant, *Lexicon*, s.v.

nians will be liable to fall into error. As the text has already suggested, that native tendency is a result of the interplay of human nature (*phusis*) with the particular political culture associated with democracy. And the reader will remember that Themistocles had suffered ostracism at the hands of his fellows.

The result of Pericles' first speech is straightforward: "The Athenians, believing that his advice was best (*arista*), voted as he recommended" (1.145). The contrast between Thucydides' presentation of this meeting of the Assembly and the Corcyraean debate is striking. Here an individual Athenian politician, introduced as the leader, the first man, and the most able of the Athenians, delivers a speech; we are told that there were other speakers and opinions were expressed on the other side, but they are irrelevant in the face of the force of Pericles' established leadership position and his powerfully persuasive discussion of material realities. Unlike the Corcyraean and Corinthian speakers, Pericles does not rely on general maxims alone; he understands and can skillfully communicate the essential material bases of state power. In the ensuing narrative, the reader learns that despite the psychological and material suffering that Pericles' austere war policy inflicted on those Athenian citizens (a majority of the total) with holdings outside the city walls, the Athenians went along with Pericles' initial recommendations. They refused the Spartan ultimatum and declined to meet the Peloponnesians in open battle when the latter invaded Attica in the summer of 431.⁵⁶ The invaders left after a couple of weeks, having accomplished nothing of substance other than demonstrating their incompetence at siegecraft by a failure to capture the fortified Attic deme (township) of Oinoe.⁵⁷ Although there were some bad moments, notably when the numerous residents of the rural deme of Acharnai realized that their town was to be the site of a Spartan encampment (2.21), after the first campaigning season the war seemed to be going according to Pericles' strategic plan. Athenian casualties in Attica were limited to cavalymen lost in skirmishes intended to restrict the scope of Peloponnesian ravaging.⁵⁸ The reader is hardly surprised to learn that it was Pericles who was chosen by his fellow citizens to deliver the traditional oration over Athens' fallen warriors that winter.

C.3. *The Fragility of Greatness: Funeral Oration of Pericles*

The Funeral Oration, delivered by Thucydides' Pericles in early 430 B.C. over the Athenian war-dead of the first campaigning season has long been recog-

⁵⁶ The policy of refusing battle was perhaps politically more difficult for Pericles to achieve than Thucydides leads us to suppose; see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 72–85. Farrar (*Origins*, 105) rightly notes that the unwillingness of rural Athenians to move into the fortified city (Thuc. 2.16.1–2) suggests a disjunction between the good of each citizen and the good of the polis.

⁵⁷ Thuc. 2.18–23. The deme of Oinoe and its walls: Ober, *Fortress Attica*, 154–55. On the limited capacity of classical Greek siegecraft to deal with well-built fortifications, see Ober, "National Ideology," and "Hoplites and Obstacles."

⁵⁸ For the use of cavalry in Attica, see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 72–85, with literature cited.

nized as an idealizing portrait of the democratic polis.⁵⁹ In addition to praising the bravery of those who gave their lives fighting for the common good, the speech emphasizes Athenian freedom and unity, and celebrates the value of working for the common good of the polis, for public rather than selfishly private ends. Throughout, the speech is dominated by a vision of the greatness of Athens and its *dunamis*; the splendor and power of the city itself are elevated into a sufficient justification for the sacrifice of the lives of those who fell in its defense.⁶⁰ The Funeral Oration thus addresses the issue of the inverse relationship between acting in narrowly individual self-interest and polis greatness, an issue to which the reader's attention is repeatedly drawn elsewhere in Thucydides' text.

Pericles' Funeral Oration is deeply complex and often seemingly deliberately ambiguous, both in its syntax and in its presentation of the polis. The complexity begins with Pericles' first words (2.35.1): Many (*hoi polloi*) of those who have given this sort of speech praise the tradition of the funeral oration itself. But in my view the fallen have already shown themselves to be excellent in action (*ergōi*), so it should be enough to honor them by the action (*ergon*) of erecting the public grave monument that you see (*horate*) before you. As in Thucydides' methodological preface, Pericles' opening words establish a hierarchy of value in which *erga* and the faculty of sight are elevated above *logos*. By this initial focus on the sufficiency of *erga* performed and witnessed, and by reminding his listeners at the beginning and again at the end of the speech that he is delivering a *logos* only because it is customary (*nomōi, kata nomon*, 2.35.1, 35.3, 46.1), Pericles subverts the "actuality" of his own expressed sentiments.⁶¹ By pointing out that his *logos* is not an *ergon*, Thucydides' Pericles alerts his audience to the element of idealization in his portrait of Athens.

The *logos/ergon* contrast is reiterated throughout the oration,⁶² but two passages are particularly noteworthy:

Furthermore, the power (*dunamis*) of the polis itself, [a power] we established by those [Athens'] very qualities, demonstrates (*sēmainei*) that this [Pericles' statement regarding Athenian excellence] is the truth (*alētheia*)—and not a product of words (*logoi*) produced for the present occasion rather than [a product] of fact (*erga*). (2.41.2)

Here, Pericles calls his own speech into question: he admits that since his speech was (by definition) merely a construct of words and was prepared for an honorific occasion, it *might* not be true in all particulars. But, he claims, the

⁵⁹ See especially Loraux, *Invention*; cf. Edmunds, *Chance*, 44–70; Thomas, *Oral Tradition*, 196–237, esp. 213, 217–21, 235–37; contrast Strasburger, "Thukydides," esp. 34–35, which argues (against de Romilly, *Thucydides*, 136ff.) that the Funeral Oration should not be read as simple praise.

⁶⁰ Greatness of the polis' *dunamis*: 2.36.2–3, 2.36.4, 2.38.2, 2.41.2–4, 2.43.1.

⁶¹ Cf. Cole (*Origins*, 53), who points out that the claim that the speech/text is superfluous in the face of the greatness of the deeds is a *topos*, found, e.g., in Pindar.

⁶² E.g., 2.43.1. Cf. also 2.40.1, 2.42.2.

self-evident power of the city, a “fact” rather than a product of words, will establish the truth of Athens’ greatness. The reader is immediately reminded of Thucydides’ earlier claim (1.21.2) that “this war itself” would demonstrate its own greatness—and the historian’s subsequent discussion of the difficulty he had in coming to an accurate understanding of the facts about the war in the face of accounts twisted by patriotic preference for one side (*eunoia*). The issue of greatness and proof arises again a few lines later:

Our power (*dunamis*) is not without the witness of great demonstrations (*megalōn sēmeiōn*), and we will be the source of wonder for those yet to come, as we are for our contemporaries. Furthermore, we have no need of a Homer to sing our praises, nor of any suchlike whose fine words please only for the moment, since the truth (*alētheia*) will show that in comparison with the facts (*erga*), [the verbal depiction] is an underestimate.⁶³ (2.41.4)

Once again, the contrast is between false, flowery praise in words (i.e., what Pericles is doing) and the trustworthy evidence of facts. But in this passage, the subversion may go even deeper. It is through the witness of great proofs, *megala sēmeia*, that future generations will be amazed at Athens. But what are these *sēmeia*? The *sēmeia* will survive to convince “those yet to come.” In light of the attack on Homer, the *sēmeia* can hardly be in the form of poetic words; we are led to imagine permanent monuments of some sort. Although Pericles does not say so explicitly, the audience is, I would suggest, being put in mind of (inter alia) the city’s new public buildings, and perhaps especially the great “Themistoclean” city walls that provided Athenian security and the backdrop for the extramural public cemetery (2.34.5) at which Pericles was speaking; these monuments were an obvious, lasting, physical manifestation of Athens’ power.⁶⁴

As modern readers know, Pericles is right to suggest that future generations will be amazed at the architectural monuments to Athenian power. But does our amazement reflect a correct assessment of Athens’ actual power? Not if we are to judge by Thucydides’ earlier comment (1.10.1–2), in which he specifically states that to criticize Homer’s *logos* on the Trojan War on the basis of the *sēmeion* of the small size of the existing town of Mycenae would be improper method. In this same passage, Thucydides points out that if future generations were to judge by the physical magnificence of the city alone, the *dunamis* of

⁶³ Cf. Gomme, in *HCT*, ad loc.: the challenge to those who write “fine words” implicitly includes the *logopoioi*. On Thucydides’ use of *sēmeion* (and the related *tekmērion*), see Immerwahr, “*Ergon*,” 277–78; Connor/Thucydides, 28; Hornblower, *Thucydides*, 100–107. Nagy (*Pindar’s Homer*, 234) discusses the use of *sēmainei* in earlier Greek literature to “indicate” rather than state explicitly. Hornblower (*Thucydides*, 118–22) discusses the possibility that Thucydides may have been influenced by Socratic thought and vocabulary; contra: de Romilly (*Thucydides*, 366–67) who argues that Thucydides seems unaware of Socrates.

⁶⁴ Pericles’ audience might call to mind the temples on the Acropolis, the city wall with its impressive gates, and the ship sheds. Presumably the proofs would also include victory monuments established in enemy lands (implied at 2.41.4). Contrast Immerwahr (“*Ergon*,” 286–89, with literature cited), who denies that actual monuments are necessarily the referent here.

Athens would appear twice as great as it was in fact. Read in light of this earlier passage, Pericles' rejection of Athens' need for a Homer because the *megala sēmeia* will impress future generations with the truth about Athenian *dunamis* seems a painfully empty boast. Once again we are being implicitly reminded that only Thucydides' accurate account of the historical facts, his "imperishable possession," will allow readers to know about either the real past or the probable future.

The self-subversive quality of the Funeral Oration is not limited to the issue of word and fact. In the course of Pericles' speech, each praiseworthy ideal eventually points to its opposite. Freedom is proclaimed as the prime good of the polis, but there is a strong hint that, as Thucydides' readers already know, the *dunamis* of Athens deprives the *poleis* within the empire of their freedom.⁶⁵ Public service defines the value of the citizen, but Pericles' language lets on that not all Athenians are public-spirited; some, those he calls "useless," prefer their own advantage to that of the polis.⁶⁶ Even the bravery and self-sacrifice of the dead will inspire not only desire for emulation, but jealousy and disbelief.⁶⁷ Thus Pericles' discussion of Athens' *politeia* as an ideal type is compromised by its location in a tremendously complex speech (as well as by its textual propinquity to the shocking plague narrative). Likewise, Pericles' evocation of Athenian government does not encourage the careful reader—one who reads the text's speeches critically in light of both the methodological principles established at the beginning of book 1 and the subsequent narrative—to embrace the rule of the demos as a simple good.

Early in the oration, Pericles defines democracy:

And it [our *politeia*] is called by the name (*onoma*) *dēmokratia* because government (*to oikein*) is not oriented toward the few (*es oligous*) but toward the majority (*es pleionas*). However, in regard to access to the law for resolving disputes, all are equal. Yet again in regard to acknowledged worth, it is a matter of individual reputation; the nature of a man's public contribution is not decided in advance on the basis of class (*ouk apo merous*), but rather on the basis of excellence. And if someone is worthy and can do something worthwhile for the polis, he is not excluded by poverty, nor because of his obscurity [of birth]. (2.37.1)

In the first clause of this passage we learn that *dēmokratia* is the name (or signifier) used for the reality (or referent) "the *politeia* of Athens" because government (*to oikein*) is oriented toward the majority (*es pleionas*) rather than the few (*es oligous*). This is a somewhat ambiguous statement, when viewed from the perspective of power and self-interest. Pericles does not go so far as to say that *dēmokratia* is the rule of the many in their own interest *over* and

⁶⁵ Freedom praised: 2.37.2, 2.40.5, 2.41.1, 2.43.4. Athens deprives *poleis* of freedom: implied at 1.139.3; explicit at 2.8.5.

⁶⁶ Especially 2.40.1–2: each citizen has both private and public interests, and even those who are mostly interested in their private affairs have opinions on politics; the man who is interested only in his own affairs (*apragmōn*) is not respected among us.

⁶⁷ Their self-sacrifice: 2.41.5, 2.42.3–4, 2.43.2; this may provoke jealousy: 2.35.2, 2.45.1.

against the interests of the few, but neither does he say that it is the collective rule of all citizens in the common interest of all.⁶⁸ Pericles' Athens (like unhappy Epidamnus) is divided into two interest groups: the few and the many. The *politeia* is called a democracy because it tilts toward one group rather than the other. The questions the reader must ask are how strongly the system tilts and whether the interests of the few can be kept congruent with those of the many in Athens. If they cannot be kept congruent, the model of Epidamnus points to a conflict of class interests that could lead to the terrors of civil war.

The next two clauses of the passage, which should explain and clarify the referent *politeia*, are spectacularly antithetical. The clause, "However, in regard to access to the law for resolving disputes, all are equal," does not explain the signifier *dēmokratia*, but contrasts to it (*onoma men . . . metesti de*). Thus, the equality in regard to the law is grammatically opposed to the government favorable to the majority, and therefore terms for "many" cannot stand for "all citizens" (as they did in Athenian democratic ideology). The third clause, "yet again in regard to acknowledged worth, it is a matter of individual reputation . . .," not only contrasts the individual citizen to the grouping of the citizenry into "few" and "majority" in the first clause, but also contrasts the citizen's individual worth to the generalized equality of "all" in the second clause. In Athens, the individual who is worthy, but poor and obscure, is not excluded from public service (as he would be if the few were to control the administration), but neither is he forced into a sort of equality that would deny his individual merit. This meritocratic ideal denies the priority of preestablished classes or orders (*ouk apo merous*), and gives priority to individual good reputation (*en tōi eudokimeī*).⁶⁹

All of this sounds good in principle: the list, group-interest-oriented administration / equality before the law for all / individual merit in public service, seems nicely (if delicately) balanced. One might extrapolate from Pericles' vision of democracy a model of a *politeia* in which legislation is enacted by interested groups, justice is carried out impartially by and for all citizens, and offices are executed by competent individuals. But the passage in question does not clarify what happens if there is a conflict between the perceived interests of the groups, or between the equality of all and the merit of individuals. Can a political balance based on such a complex set of contrasts hold up under the

⁶⁸ As he might have: contrast 6.39.1, in which Athenagoras of Syracuse defines *dēmokratia* as the rule (*archein*) of the "entire citizenship" (*dēmos xumpas*), *oligarchia* as the rule of a part (*meros*). See the comments of Gomme, in *HCT* 2: 107–10, arguing against the idea that Pericles' use of *dēmokratia* was defensive or that the word was coined by opponents of democracy; Thomas, *Oral Tradition*, 234. Sealey ("Origins," 280–82) reads Pericles' remark as apologizing for democracy. In an argument that inverts that of Sealey, Derderian ("Leaving Words," ch. 4) suggests that Pericles' *dēmokratia keklētai* recalls the traditional language of the funerary epigram (e.g., *kore keklesomai aiei*, *CEG* 24), and thus "alludes to a new collective *kleos* attached to the name *dēmokratia*." See also E. Harris, "Pericles' Praise."

⁶⁹ Edmunds (*Chance*, 47–56) offers a close and insightful analysis of the force of the antitheses, suggesting that in the end the passage leads to the conclusion of 2.65.9: *dēmokratia* existed in *logos*, whereas in fact Athens was ruled by its intelligent, insightful leader.

stressful circumstances of a long, hard war? We must not forget that this is an oration over war dead, and the reader already knows that the fighting has only just begun.⁷⁰

Let's jump ahead to the next passage in the Funeral Oration that deals explicitly with how the Athenians run their polity.

And we ourselves can [collectively] judge rightly regarding affairs, even if [each of us] does not [individually] originate the arguments; we do not consider words (*logoi*) to be an impediment to actions (*erga*), but rather [regard it] essential to be previously instructed (*prodidachthēnai*) by speech (*logōi*) before embarking on necessary actions (*ergōi*). We are peculiar also in that we hold that we are simultaneously persons who are daring and who vigorously debate (*eklogizesthai*) what they will put their hands to. Among other men, ignorance (*amathia*) leads to rashness, while reasoned debate (*logismos*) just bogs them down. (2.40.2–3)

This passage, virtually a definition of democratic knowledge and its relation to enactment and action, helps to clarify the contrast between group-interest-oriented government and individual merit, alluded to in the previous passage.⁷¹ The Athenians recognize that not everyone is equally capable of coming up with plans (this will be the job of the individual political leader), but the many can participate in making the decisions (as Assemblymen). So far so good, but in the next clause it becomes clear that the Athenians are proud of making policy on the basis of *logoi*, and they reject the existence of a hierarchy of value between *logoi* and *erga*. As we have seen, Thucydides considers untested and competing *logoi* to be a dubious basis for understanding reality, and he elevates *erga* above *logoi* in his hierarchy of explanatory values. Moreover, as we have seen, Pericles himself has emphasized the *logos/ergon* contrast and has described his own *logos* as strictly unnecessary in the face of the self-evident *erga* of accomplishment and monument.

So are Pericles' Athenians an exception to the general rules that Thucydides has established in his preface? The Funeral Oration certainly suggests that its ideal Athenians believe themselves to be exceptional: Pericles points out that *other* people are unable to blend speech and action in the Athenian fashion.⁷² But the reader must remember Thucydides' own *rejection* of Athenian exceptionalism in regard to intellectual attainments in the methodological introduction (above, 2.A.1). Moreover, even while claiming to base its praise of Athenian exceptionality on the clearest proofs (cf. 2.42.1), the Funeral Oration itself calls that very exceptionality into question, by revealing fissures within the

⁷⁰ The incorporation of interest-group politics into a democratic matrix might seem to a modern reader to approach the ideal of "polyarchy" advocated by Dahl (*Democracy*) but Thucydides' idea of a good "well-mixed" constitution (a *xunkrasis*) is a moderate oligarchy that excluded the majority of free adult males from participatory citizenship: 8.97.2.

⁷¹ Cf. Immerwahr, "*Ergon*," 285: the "central ideal of the [Funeral] Oration is the definition of democratic courage as a kind of knowledge."

⁷² Pericles is presumably referring, *imprimis*, to the Spartans. But cf. Hdt. 7.50.1–2: King Xerxes' defense of the need to act without much reflection lest nothing be accomplished.

ideal of a politics based, first, on seamlessly blending the interests of the few, the many, and the individual, and second, on employing public speeches not only to plan deeds but to create social realities. The oration shows that these problematic ideals are the basis of Athens' power, and thus reveals to the reader the potential instability of Athenian power.⁷³ That instability remains only potential. As long as the Athenians are well instructed by *logoi* that are properly grounded in Athenian interests and in material reality—as long as Athenians follow wise leaders—the system can work. But Thucydides' reader has already been given reason to doubt that the Athenians are consistently well informed by the speeches they hear; she knows that they have willingly expelled one of their wisest leaders; and she has been told that they have a "native" tendency to err. If the Athenians are not presented with appropriate bases for decision-making—if they must rely for instruction on the sorts of speech delivered by the Corcyraean and Corinthian ambassadors—the great and stable Athens established by Pericles' Funeral Oration may prove to exist only in the idealizing discourse of the eulogistic speaker, and through a suspension of the disbelief encouraged by the Funeral Oration's own antithetical structure.

C.4. *The Last Days of Pericles*

In the summer after Pericles' Funeral Oration, the second year of the war (430 B.C.), came another and longer Spartan invasion, a devastating plague, a crisis in Athenian confidence, and the second (and last) of Pericles' Assembly speeches recorded in Thucydides' history (2.60–64).⁷⁴ Pericles begins this speech by asserting that he had accurately predicted the downturn in the Athenian mood—the reader is led to suppose that very pronounced shifts in the national climate of opinion were factored into Pericles' strategic planning and thus that mood swings within the electorate could be accommodated by Pericles' political calculus.⁷⁵ He staunchly reasserts the priority of the unified public interests of the state over the diverse private interests of each individual Athenian (2.60.2–5). The reader of the Funeral Oration was made aware of the tension between public and private, between the self-identity of the Athenian as a citizen and as a private person or a member of a social subgroup. Now Pericles bluntly underlines the essential precondition of Athenian flourishing: the individual's identification with the state must take priority over all other loyalties and allegiances. Pericles then claims that he will let his audience in on a secret that lay at the heart of Athenian policy: the special character of Athenian

⁷³ See esp. 2.36.4: Athenian *politeia* and *tropoi* were what made Athens *megālē*. Cogan (*Human Thing*, 41–42) argues that Athenian exceptionalism is the central point of the speech. Near the end of the text, at 8.96.5, Thucydides in propria persona confirms Athens' character as tending to swiftness and enterprise, with specific contrast to the slow and unimaginative Spartans; but he also points out the limits of Athenian exceptionalism by adding a third party to the equation: the Syracusans are "most like" the Athenians in character and so fought best against them.

⁷⁴ Scholarship on the speech: de Romilly, *Thucydides*, 120–30; Edmunds, *Chance*, 70–76; Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc.; Yunis, *Taming*, 83–85.

⁷⁵ Cf. Parry, "Logos," 87.

sea power. Ps.-Xenophon had also focused on Athenian sea power, but rather than emphasizing the relationship between lower-class rowers and Athenian government, Pericles describes sea power in quasi-mystical terms as the control of one of two earthly spheres and as a power completely unlike anything produced on land. Because of their command of the seas, there is no power on earth, not even the king of Persia, capable of stopping the Athenians from going where they might choose.⁷⁶

This passage in Pericles' second Assembly speech stands as a particularly evocative attempt to define the mysterious essence of Athenian *dunamis*. Pericles' speech suggests to the reader that sea power is a latent strength; the ships can lie motionless in their sheds until needed. So, too, were Athenian reserve capital and manpower latent sources of strength: Capital lay dormant, most strikingly in the form of the cult statue of Athena Parthenos, with its removable golden drapery. Athenian fighting men remained passive behind their walls while the enemy invaded Attica. But at the moment a need arose, capital could be conjoined with men and ships to produce extraordinary levels of deployed power and virtually limitless freedom of action. The Athenians could go where they wished, do as they liked, because Athens' latent strength could be almost instantaneously materialized as the mobilized fleet cutting through the waves of the Aegean to effect Athens' will upon any object identified by the policymaker. Pericles describes this as a secret, because when regarded from the set of traditional Greek assumptions about the sort of power produced by hoplite republics and delivered by classical land armies, the sea power of the democratic polis was nearly incomprehensible. The rapidity and precision with which power could be deployed by the state commanding superior naval forces collapsed conventional assumptions about the relationship between power, time, and space.⁷⁷ Athenian sea power narrowed to the disappearing point the gap between desire and fact, between the wish of the policymaker that something should occur and the accomplishment of that wish in the material world. In 430 B.C. the sum of Athens' accomplished wishes was the Athenian empire. But this freedom was not absolute; with the empire came stern responsibilities.

Much of the rest of the speech focuses on the nature of empire (*archē*) itself, which Pericles reminds his listeners is "now like a tyranny" (2.63.2). Pericles is at pains to explain to the Athenians that the possession of an empire entailed grave security risks—but only if they were foolish enough to suppose that their freedom of action was a freedom from imperial responsibilities. The entirely unrealistic and pseudo-altruistic policy advocated by certain apathetic and useless Athenians who wanted to relinquish the empire would, according to Pericles, put Athens in extreme danger (2.63). Pericles does not need to spell out the equation in detail; its outlines are clear enough from what had gone before: Giving up the empire meant that Athens would lose the revenues that provided

⁷⁶ 2.62.2–3; contrast 1.16 in the Archaeology: the Ionians, an early Greek sea power, are stymied by the rise of Persia, a major land power.

⁷⁷ On Athenian *dunamis* as a radical departure from traditional forms of Greek power, see Crane, "Fear and Pursuit," and "Power , Prestige."

for the fortified security of the city and maintained the navy. Moreover, the weight of Athenian tribute and punishments of recalcitrant subjects had brought home the meaning of lost autonomy to the states of the empire. Their original, self-serving decision to pay Athens to maintain Aegean security now appeared short-sighted and resentment at their own past folly led to hatred of Athens (2.63.1, 2.64.5). Any Athenian attempt to abandon imperial responsibilities would spark attempts at revenge. Deprived of imperial resources, a weakened Athens would suffer the consequences of the self-interested policies that had created and maintained its current strength. In sum, the aggressive foreign policy that put Athens in a position of hegemonic authority carried with it foreign-policy burdens that could not lightly be shed.

Pericles' second speech reveals Athenian *dunamis* as an extraordinarily powerful and complex mechanism that conjoins Athens as a sociopolitical entity with Athens as a military and imperial power.⁷⁸ The machine produces vast wealth for its operators, but it cannot be shut down without disastrous consequences. Its efficient operation depends on national cohesion: the subordination of private interests to the public good. It also, at least by implication, requires the skills of a master craftsman, a political leader who understands its complicated workings and who can make adjustments as necessary. Thucydides thus focuses the reader's attention on the foresighted and realistic vision of Pericles, a man she now realizes is as important to the future success of imperial Athens as Themistocles was to the past foundation of the empire. In Thucydides' account, both Pericles and Themistocles understood the conjoined material factors of manpower, sea power, fortifications, and capital—the very factors that Thucydides in propria persona has underlined as essential to the flourishing of Greek civilization in the Archaeology.

Pericles' two Assembly speeches, read in the context established by the methodological introduction and the prior narrative, lead the reader to suppose that Athens enjoyed great political and material advantages heading into the war and should indeed have won it. But then comes section 2.65: a laudatory summary of Periclean policy, the announcement that Athens in fact had lost the war, and the statement of Thucydides' opinions that Athens lost the war because Pericles' inferior political successors did not stick to his policy with regard to sea power and empire, and that they gave away Athenian chances by looking to their private good rather than to the common good of the state.

At the beginning of section 2.65, having explained that Pericles' second Assembly speech was meant to stanch the Athenians' anger at Pericles himself and to turn their thoughts away from their present miseries, Thucydides makes a particularly telling comment. In respect to state policy (*dēmosiai*), the Athenians did accept Pericles' words. They did not send a peace embassy to Sparta,

⁷⁸ The ironically close relationship between democracy and empire in fifth-century Athens: Finley, "Fifth-Century Athenian Empire"; Raaflaub, *Entdeckung der Freiheit*, esp. 244–48, and "Democracy, Power, and Imperialism"; Wood *Peasant-Citizen*, 135–36. Forrest ("Athenian Generation Gap") suggests that in 413–412, Athenian oligarchs were misled by this "doctrinaire view" into believing that since the empire had begun to crumble, the democracy could easily be deposed.

and they began to prosecute the war with renewed vigor. But in respect to their interests as private individuals (*idiai*), they still felt aggrieved (2.65.1). Taken as individuals, the Athenians are further broken out by Thucydides into classes: the ordinary people (*ho dēmos*) were angry since they had lost what little they had, while the powerful elite (*hoi dunatoi*) had lost their landed estates in the country. This sociological terminology is ominously familiar to the reader: the conflict of “demos versus *dunatoi*” had sparked the Epidamnian *stasis* narrative. Potentially dangerous internal divisions, obliquely signaled in the Funeral Oration, have now begun to haunt the Athenians.⁷⁹

Yet as long as Pericles lived, the tendency of the Athenians to fragment into mutually hostile private-interest-oriented sociological classes was seemingly restrained, and they were still able to act collectively in the public interest. Pericles was slapped with a fine, but soon, “as is the habit of a crowd (*homilos*),” he was reelected general and entrusted with the conduct of all public affairs. This turnabout Thucydides attributes to conjoined public and private factors: the Athenians were feeling their “own personal” (*oikeia*) troubles less acutely, and they believed that Pericles was the most worthy man they had when it came to the needs of the polis as a whole (2.65.2–4). In this latter opinion Thucydides heartily concurs: Under Pericles and during the peace, he says, Athens had been wisely led, and the polis reached its acme. Moreover, “when the war broke out, in this circumstance, too, he seemed an accurate prognosticator in respect to power” (*prognous tēn dunamin*, 2.65.5). Pericles did not live long after his second Thucydidean Assembly speech: he died two and a half years into the war. Yet after his death, we are told, his forethought (*pronoia*) in respect to the war became clearer than ever, since he had told the Athenians that they would prevail in the war if they avoided risking their sea power, attempting to expand their empire, or otherwise endangering the polis (2.65.6–7). Thucydides here suggests that Athenian power, understood in the terms laid out in the methodological introduction and the prior narrative, *would* have prevailed if only Periclean leadership had been maintained.⁸⁰

Unfortunately, Thucydides continues, post-Periclean leadership was not up to Pericles’ standard. The key difference, we are immediately told (2.65.7), is that Pericles’ successors failed to pay attention to the interests of the state, and they made policy on the basis of what they supposed would conduce to their private (*idia*) fame and private advantage. As a result, their successes brought advantage and reputation only to themselves, while their failures weakened the ability

⁷⁹ Pouncey (*Necessities of War*) regards the degeneration of Athenian capacity for collective action and the growth of a malicious devotion to individualistic selfishness to be Thucydides’ main, pessimistic, theme.

⁸⁰ Thucydides on the stabilizing factor of Periclean leadership: Connor, *Thucydides*, 62; Farrar, *Origins*, 158–77; Yunis, *Taming*, 64–67, 85. On the complex question of the accuracy of Thucydides’ depiction of Pericles’ financial preparations, see Meiggs, *Athenian Empire*, 324–39; Kallet-Marx, *Money*; with Hornblower, *Commentary*, 2: 93–98. There is reason to suppose that Pericles seriously underestimated the material costs to Athens of maintaining the empire.

of the state as a whole to conduct the war. Pericles, by contrast, with his inherent distinction (*axiōma*) and capacity to reason (*gnōmē*), was self-evidently incorruptible and impervious to bribery. He treated the *plēthos* as a free man should (*eleutherōs*), and he was not led by them; rather, he was himself the leader (*ouk ēgeto . . . autos ēge*). Since he had no desire to gain influence by improper means, he was not compelled to say things that his audience would find pleasurable (*pros hēdonēn ti legein*); rather, he had the capacity to contradict and speak angrily to his audience. Thus he was able both to deflate dangerous public moods of overconfidence and to restore confidence when the citizens were excessively discouraged. We have seen, in Pericles' second speech, an example of confidence-restoring rhetoric under profoundly adverse conditions. Yet the reader who has pondered the lessons of the Archaeology may be even more impressed by Pericles' capacity to restrain what she has been led to suppose is a natural tendency to state aggrandizement, especially under apparently near-ideal "pleonectic conditions" of domestic security (walls and money) and immense instrumental capacity for imposing the national will overseas (fleet and money). With Athens' risks apparently minimized and its means to affect other states maximized, the task of preventing the Athenians—whose active and ambitious national character has been frequently asserted—from freely exercising their expansionist impulses seems daunting indeed.

This is the context for Thucydides' dramatic revelation of the true nature of Athenian politics under Pericles: the polis was—or at least was tending to become—"in *logos* a democracy, in *ergon* the rule (*archē*) of the foremost man" (*tou prōtou andros*, 2.65.9).⁸¹ Pericles' successors, more or less equal to one another but each eager to become first man, sought to please the demos (*etra-ponto kath' hēdonas tōi dēmōi*). Which is to say, based on the narrative so far, they looked only toward the selfish interests of one sociological class within the polis. In so doing, they gave up control of the affairs of state (*ta pragmata*, 2.65.10)—that is, they allowed free rein to the aggressive tendencies of a putatively secure people of active character and instrumental capacity, without adequate regard to historical contingency or the feasibility of particular projects. And so, as the attentive reader has been led to expect, given these circumstances and given a "great polis with an empire to govern," serious mistakes were made (*hēmartēthē*, 2.65.10–11). Thucydides takes as his case in point the error (*hamartēma*) made by the Athenians in respect to the Sicilian Expedition and its aftermath. He then concludes chapter 2.65 with a return to the theme of Pericles' excellence: Even after the disaster in Sicily (413 B.C.), the Athenians held out for another eight years against a staggering array of enemies, including the son of the king of Persia, who provided the necessary capital for a Peloponnesian fleet (2.65.11–12). Thus, in the end it was the Athenians who destroyed themselves by their "private quarrels" (*idiai diaphorai*). "So overwhelmingly

⁸¹ Ste. Croix (*Origins*, 73) argues, on the basis of the imperfect *egingeto*, that we should translate "was tending to become" rather than "was."

great,” concludes Thucydides, “were the resources that Pericles had in mind at the time when he prophesied an easy victory for the polis over the Peloponnesians” (2.65.13).

At the watershed chapter 2.65, the confident prediction of victory on the basis of Pericles’ strategic planning is closely related to the claim that while Pericles led Athens, *dēmokratia* remained a convenient title (*logos*) for an institutional framework, while in fact the state was being ruled by the first man—through his strength of personal character, intelligence, and rhetorical ability. By contrast, after Pericles’ death, *dēmokratia* as a political culture achieved the status of *ergon*. This meant that the firm public policy of the insightful statesman was replaced by divisive selfishness and pandering on the part of would-be leaders, which in turn explains what went wrong in Athenian war policy and why Athens eventually lost. But in many ways the analysis Thucydides offers here seems altogether too pat.⁸² Rather than simply aberrant selfishness on the part of a few bad leaders, the long narrative following 2.65 suggests that it was deeper structural problems associated with the process of decision-making and policy formation in the Athenian *dēmokratia* that led to Athens’ loss in the Peloponnesian War. We will revisit Thucydides’ summation of Periclean and post-Periclean politics (below, 2.E.2). For the present, it seems fair to say that Thucydides’ reader is offered a convenient provisional summary of Athenian wartime political developments at 2.65, a summary that focuses her attention on the character of Athenian leadership and its association with imperial policy and public speech. The rhetorical practice of post-Periclean leaders was for Thucydides a key symptom of serious political problems, as the next scene set in the Athenian Assembly amply demonstrates.

D. JUSTICE AND INTEREST II: THE MYTILENEAN DEBATE

In the fourth year of the war (428 B.C.), the great polis of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos declared itself independent of Athenian control. This event confirmed Pericles’ comment about the hostile attitudes of subject states and fulfilled the prediction about the tendency for Athens’ imperial subjects to seek new allies, made by the Corinthian envoys in the debate over Corcyra.⁸³ Thucydides points out that the revolt of Mytilene occurred at a difficult time for Athens: the city was suffering from plague and “from the war, which had only just now reached its full strength” (3.3.1). Beset by these concerns, most Athenians were reluctant to acknowledge the truth of the report (3.3.1). Thus, unlike Thucydides’

⁸² For the unsatisfactory nature of the analysis of 2.65, see O. Murray, “Greek Historians,” 196; with discussion of Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc.

⁸³ Scholarship on the debate: Woodhead, “Thucydides’ Portrait”; Andrewes, “Mytilene Debate”; Bodin, “Diodote”; Kagan, “Speeches”; Macleod, “Reason and Necessity”; Cogan, *Human Thing*, 50–65; Hornblower, *Commentary*, 1: 420–22; Andrews, “Cleon’s Ethopoetics”; Yunis *Taming*, 87–101. Mytilene was not a tribute-paying ally, but a contributor of ships, and so in the small, privileged category of quasi-free states within the empire.

ideal reader, they interpreted what they heard according to their own self-interested preferences, and they rejected the truth-value of unpleasant news out of hand. But eventually the danger of the situation intruded on the Athenian consciousness, and a fleet was sent to besiege Mytilene. The Mytileneans were soon shut up behind their city walls. Hard-pressed by an efficient Athenian siege and betrayed in their hopes of reinforcements from Sparta, they ran low on food. The aristocratic leaders of the revolt consequently armed the Mytilenean lower classes in anticipation of a battle. Yet once armed, the demos of Mytilene refused to support the insurrection. Faced with demotic intransigence and the specter of civil war, the leaders of Mytilene hurriedly surrendered (3.28).

Thucydides' narrative demonstrates that the material factors detailed in Pericles' two Assembly speeches played key roles in the Athenian suppression of the Mytilenean revolt. If the Mytilenean campaign consumed considerable Athenian time, effort, and capital, Athenian *dunamis* had stood the test. Athenian financial reserves, sea power, and generalship in the end proved fully capable of overwhelming or overawing all opposition. But if Athens were to remain a great power, deployment of military strength must be conjoined with an appropriate imperial policy. Making good policy would not be easy in the absence of Pericles' stabilizing presence. As the Athenian Assembly set about deciding who had been responsible for the uprising and who should be punished, the atmosphere within the central Athenian decision-making body was characterized by strong emotions, confused perceptions regarding the wellsprings of national power, and stark social divisions.

The Mytilenean revolt had coincided with a Spartan naval expedition to Ionia (3.29–33). Although the Spartan admiral Alcidas and his small fleet accomplished relatively little in military terms and failed to aid the Mytilenean revolt, he threw a bad fright into the Athenians. The Athenians were used to thinking of the Aegean as their private lake; yet Alcidas was able to move about the Aegean at will, and he brutally murdered a number of captives (3.32.1). The mood of the first Assembly held to decide the fate of the Mytileneans was not charitable. In a fit of anger, the Athenians voted (*hupo orgēs edoxen autois*) to treat the population of Mytilene as a single entity. They ordered their general on Lesbos to kill all adult male Mytileneans and to sell the rest of the polis' population into slavery (3.36.1–3). A trireme was dispatched to Lesbos carrying the grim instructions. But very quickly, while the ship was still en route, Athenian anger was replaced by a sense of remorse, and “it became clear” that “most of the citizens” wanted a chance to reconsider their action (3.36.5).⁸⁴

A second Assembly was hastily called, and we are told that several speeches were given on either side of the issue. Thucydides presents two orations that, he

⁸⁴ I point out, in passing, that focusing on Athenian Assembly speeches necessarily leaves out many of the nuances of Thucydides' text. While Thucydides surely intends to criticize the behavior of the Assembly and its leaders, he does not regard Athens as uniquely immoral. The behavior of the Assembly in the Mytilenean Debate is meant to be read against the brutal treatment of the prisoners of war from Athens' ally Plataea by the Thebans and Spartans (3.52–68).

says, represent the most starkly opposed positions (3.49.1). The first of the pair is spoken by Cleon, son of Kleainetos, the citizen who had been “victorious” (*enenikēkei*, 3.36.6) in advocating the general punishment at the first Assembly. Thucydides describes Cleon as “the most violent of the citizens [of Athens] and by far the best trusted by the demos” (3.36.6). Cleon’s speech, which opposes any amelioration of the sentence against the Mytileneans, is attacked by a certain Diodotus, the son of Eukrates, about whom we are told nothing other than that he had also spoken against Cleon at the previous meeting (3.41). The two speeches are a matched pair and share several themes; both offer a substantial “meta-rhetoric” (i.e., a rhetorical discussion of the nature of public deliberation), and both purport to explain the proper foundations of state policy. Together they offer Thucydides’ reader her first detailed insight into the environment and tenor of post-Periclean democratic politics and policy-making. Although, in line with the analysis of 2.65, the self-interest of Athenian politicians is a key factor, the Mytilenean Debate as a whole suggests that self-interested behavior on the part of politicians was only one factor in a much more complicated social and political situation.

Cleon begins his speech with an implicit rejection of one of Pericles’ points in the Funeral Oration: he had often noticed that a *dēmokratia* is incapable of running an empire (3.37.1). Why is this? Because the Athenians fail to see that their empire really *is* a tyranny (not just “*like* a tyranny,” per Pericles’ second Assembly speech), and because of their indecisiveness (3.37.2). The root of the problem is overclever public speechmakers. Athens has no need for these men; indeed,

ignorance (*amathia*) mixed with moderate sobriety (*sōphrosunē*) is more useful (*ōphelimōteron*) [to the polis] than cleverness mixed with insubordination. Ordinary men, when compared with the more gifted, actually administer (*oikousi*) poleis better. For the latter [the gifted] wish to appear wiser than the laws and to excel at speaking about the public weal, since they are unable to express a clear opinion in regard to more important things. And thus they often ruin poleis. But the former [ordinary men], not trusting overmuch in their own sharp wits (*xunesis*), are content to remain less learned than the laws, and are unable to pick apart a speech by a good speaker. These are men who can judge impartially rather than [acting like] rivalrous competitors (*agōnistai*), and so things go well. It would be best for us [politicians] to do likewise and avoid being so swept away by cleverness and the competition in intelligence (*deinotēti kai xuneseōs agōni*) that we contradict our own true opinions when we advise you, the masses (*to plēthos*). (3.37.3–5)

Thus, if there must be politicians, Cleon suggests that they should act and speak more like ordinary Athenians. Thucydides in propria persona had praised Themistocles’ “mental acuteness” (*xunesis*), and Pericles had praised a generalized Athenian capacity for reasoning in the Funeral Oration, where acting rashly out of ignorance is regarded as typical of non-Athenians. Cleon, for his part, disparages those who regard themselves as clever, and he praises ignorance (*amathia*) as the basis of good popular government for Athens. But as it

is, he goes on to say, instead of politicians acting like ordinary citizens, the ordinary folk all wish that they could be clever speakers themselves. Lacking actual oratorical attainments, they fancy themselves connoisseurs of oratory (3.37.6–7). As a result, debate causes delay, which is to the advantage of wrongdoers. Instead of wasting their time listening to speeches and then endlessly changing their minds about policy, the Athenians would do better to act (that is, vote on policy issues) in the heat of righteous anger and then stick by those decisions (3.38.1). Again, the contrast is both with Thucydides' Themistocles, who combined brilliant political analysis with quick action, and with Pericles' ideal Athenians, for whom there was no dissonance between reasoned debate and decisive action.

Cleon implies that there can be no *good* reason for opposing his own policy of general punishment, of treating Mytilene as a political unit rather than as a diverse society. He sets up a narrow and exclusionary framework to explain the motives of those Athenians who spoke against his proposal: either they hoped to make a public display of their rhetorical powers, or they had been bribed to support an inherently bad policy. In either case, Cleon reminds his audience, in these sorts of contests (*agones*), it is the speakers who reap the prizes (i.e., adulation or bribe money), while it is the polis that is exposed to dangers (3.38.2–3, cf. 3.40.3).

But you [citizens] yourselves are the cause of this evil for having set up these contests (*agones*); you have become accustomed to being spectators of orations (*logoi*) while gaining your knowledge of facts (*erga*) from what you hear. You decide what is possible regarding what has to be done in the future by looking to those who speak well. Even regarding events of the past, you don't rate the evidence of what you actually saw above what you have heard in some overclever bit of verbiage. (3.38.4)

This statement, with its emphasis on the priority of vision, experience, and *erga* and its overt rejection of speech contests as a means of imparting a valid understanding of either past or future, has clear and obvious affinities to Thucydides' own approach to "useful" (*ōphelima*) history as laid out in the methodological introduction. Thucydides offers to lead the reader away from contests of words to a dispassionate understanding of "objective" historical truth that will prepare him to understand what is to come. Cleon likewise claims to know what is "more useful" (*ōphelimōteron*) to the polis (above, 3.37.3), and his mission is to lead the Athenians away from their foolish habits of spectatorship at speech contests (3.39.1). But what does Cleon offer instead? Hardly a dispassionate grasp of either material necessities or historical realities. Rather, Cleon urges the Athenians to recall vividly their own emotions at the time the revolt first broke out, and he advises them to act according to that mimetically restored emotional state (3.40.7). Like Thucydides of 2.65, Cleon finds much to criticize in democratic Athens, and he employs some of the same terminology, but in the end Cleon urges his listeners to take the easy path of relying on their visceral

emotions when making decisions. Thucydides' reader, struggling with the complex text, is not offered such an easy road to right judgment.⁸⁵

Cleon's meta-rhetoric results in his anti-Periclean claim that political speech is an impediment to action and that strong-felt emotion is a more appropriate wellspring of policy than public debate. Diodotus, on the other hand, stoutly defends reiterated public discussion of especially important affairs. Indeed, he says, it is anger and overquickness that are the greatest impediments to good policy (*euboulia*, 3.42.1).

But if someone argues that speeches (*logoi*) are not teachers in regard to affairs (*pragmata*), either he is a fool (*axunetos*) or he is on the lookout for some private (*idiai*) advantage. He is a fool if he supposes that it is possible to consider the uncertain future by some other means; he is seeking his own advantage if he hopes to propose some shameful thing, and is unable to speak well or convincingly regarding it, yet by slandering well is able to strike fear into both the opposing speakers and the listeners. (3.42.2)

Here, Diodotus reveals the obvious flaw in Cleon's anti-public-speech meta-rhetoric: Cleon's attack on clever speech is embedded in a clever speech, and thereby demonstrates the impossibility of communicating complex meanings except through the medium of words. Like Cleon, Diodotus attributes to his opponents an illegitimate private interest in personal gain, and he claims that those private interests will endanger the state. But, having suggested that Cleon either is a fool or is out for personal advantage, Diodotus then attacks the rhetorical practice of claiming that one's enemies place personal gain over the public good (3.42.3–6). It would be much better, Diodotus goes on to say, if the Athenians would abandon their habit of dishonoring those who lose public debates. If they quit punishing losers of oratorical contests, then orators would speak their minds honestly, rather than advocating policies they did not believe in with an eye toward gaining the favor of the many (*charizomenos . . . to plēthos*, 3.42.6). But, he continues, as it is, we do just the opposite, and because speakers have to work under constant suspicion of being bribe-takers, the polis loses the benefit of good advice. Evil and good-willed speakers alike are forced to lie, and the polis is the only entity for whose good it is *impossible* for a citizen to work openly.⁸⁶

Although the appeal to the public good initially recalls Pericles, Diodotus' meta-rhetoric is almost as muddled as Cleon's: he accuses Cleon of self-inter-

⁸⁵ Cleon's criticism is conventional, strikingly similar (e.g.) to a fragment of Solonian poetry (F 11.7–8 West): you (Athenians) “gape (*orate*) at the tongue and at the words of a wily man, but you do not perceive (*blepete*) the thing (*ergon*) that is done”; for other parallels, from Homer and archaic poetry, see Levine, “Symposium and the *Polis*,” 186–89. Andrews (“Cleon's Ethopoetics,” 27–33) emphasizes the oft-noted parallels with the language of Thucydides' Pericles, to the point of claiming that Pericles, like Cleon, is a “champion of *orgē*” (28). This seems to me to overstate the case; see below, 2.n.109.

⁸⁶ *monēn te polin dia tas perinoias eu poiēsai ek tou prophanous mē exapatēsanta adunaton* (3.43.1–3). On this passage, contrast Yunis, *Taming*, 99–101 (who attempts to get Diodotus off the horns of his dilemma), with literature cited.

est, and in the next breath points out how destructive the rhetorical practice of making such accusations is to the political practice of decision-making. Indeed, he claims that slanderous rhetoric is specifically destructive in that *all* speakers, even good-willed men (like himself), are made into liars. In sum, Diodotus willfully embraces the well-known “Cretan Liar” paradox. Since Diodotus is an orator, and all orators are liars, the truths he claims to teach through speech are thoroughly compromised, and his defense of the value of public discussion becomes paradoxical. What public good can result from reiterated debates among liars? Moreover, his comment on the impossibility of doing good openly for the polis explicitly contradicts Pericles’ Funeral Oration encomium of Athenian public-spiritedness. If public speakers are liars and unable to do good for the state in any overt way, how are we to take his next statement (meant to refute Cleon’s claim that ordinary, ignorant citizens are good administrators): it is necessary, he says, that we speakers look a little bit further ahead (*peraiterō pronouontas*) than the rest of you citizens who just glance things over in a superficial manner (3.43.4). Thucydides is all in favor of forethought. But Diodotus’ comment remains obscure: What techniques will the speaker use to gauge the likely course of future events? How will the results of this forethought be translated into good state policy in a democracy, given the necessity of public mendacity? Why should listeners believe that an acknowledged liar is sincere when he claims to seek the public good rather than private advantage? Diodotus does not say, but then, given his argument about the impossibility of doing good openly, he simply cannot.

The reader of these convoluted meta-rhetorical arguments may opine that neither Cleon’s claims for policy-making by reference to the ignorance of ordinary men nor Diodotus’ claims for leadership of the democracy by foresightful yet mendacious public speakers is particularly convincing. Our sense of unease is not assuaged by their respective arguments regarding the proper basis for policy. Both speakers agree that the main determinant in the Assembly’s decision must be Athens’ imperial interests, and each claims that his policies will best serve Athenian interests. Each orator acknowledges the fact that Athens’ imperial income derives from prosperous cities, a very salient point given the importance of reserve capital in the Archaeology and in Pericles’ discussion of Athenian strengths. Cleon comes up with a tortuous argument for linking the utter destruction of Mytilene with imperial prosperity (3.39.7–8), but the economic point clearly favors the case for leniency: dead men don’t pay tribute. Yet Diodotus mentions the negative economic consequences of Cleon’s policy only in passing (3.46.3).

Rather than work through the cost/benefit equation with specific reference to Mytilene, both Cleon and Diodotus emphasize that the issue at hand has more to do with the future than with the present, and with the empire in general rather than with the polis of Mytilene in particular (3.40.7, 3.44.3, 3.48.2). Both speakers are theorists of power before being practical policymakers concerned with contingent realities. They agree that the treatment of Mytilene will be a test case for what happens to insurgents, and thus the issue is not the material

and particular results of exterminating a certain great and prosperous city, but rather it is how Athenian harshness or leniency will be *perceived* by the other subject states. Each speaker, in short, claims theoretical insight and states that policy should be made on the basis of his theory of human behavior. Neither makes any serious use of actual Greek history.

The issue thus becomes group psychology rather than the “material or historical facts of the matter” –indeed, neither speaker suggests that facts matter very much. And as a result, the two contestants must base their arguments on appeals to human nature, to assumptions about what “men or states are likely to do in a given situation.” As we have seen, human nature is a major issue for Thucydides. But how, according to these Athenian public speakers, is one to know human nature? Despite his stated confidence in ordinary citizens as decisionmakers and his frequent use of maxims depending on the common sense of the many, Cleon implies that the everyday experiences of the men in his audience are *not* an adequate basis for making judgments about international relations (3.37.2), whereas Diodotus—who believes that only politicians with special insight into affairs can come up with good public policy—claims (3.45.2–3, 45.6) that the collective behavior of poleis closely mimics the private behavior of individuals.⁸⁷ Cleon claims that the Mytileneans did not revolt, but rather they willfully attacked Athens, on the grounds that people revolt only when they have suffered some form of violence (3.39.2). Thus he is able to argue that it would be improper to forgive the Mytileneans on the grounds that “it is human nature to fall into error” (*hamartēin anthrōpinōs*, 3.40.1). Diodotus disagrees: it *is* in fact the natural tendency of all men, both in private and in public, to make mistakes (*hapantes kai idiai kai dēmosiai hamartanein*, 3.45.3). Yet for Diodotus it is not only suffering violence that leads people to revolt, but a wide variety of factors: poverty, wealth, hope, chance, and emotion of various sorts (3.45.4–6). Once again, neither speaker offers any concrete examples to buttress his opinion.

If they disagree on the wellsprings of human folly, neither do the two speakers agree on what factors will successfully deter the tendency of people to make mistakes (in this case, the tendency of subjects to resist their more powerful hegemon). For Cleon, it is a universal truth that people despise kindness but respect harsh treatment (3.39.5). Wrong, according to Diodotus: the harshest punishment known is the death sentence, and that has not prevented people from doing wrong in the past. To support this claim, Diodotus develops a quasi-historical argument: It “seems probable” that long ago (3.45.3) sentences for wrongdoing were less strict than they are now, and that they were gradually made harsher in a vain attempt at deterrence. He cites no historical authority for this opinion, and it is not at all clear that it would fit what most Athenians

⁸⁷ On Cleon’s use of maxims, cf. Andrews, “Cleon’s Ethopoetics.” Pericles (1.144.3, 2.64.6) had also suggested strong links between the individual and the polis, but in the highly privileged Athenian context; cf. Balot, “Genealogy of Greed,” ch. 2.

thought they knew about their own past history.⁸⁸ But it does fit Diodotus' argument nicely, and rhetorical expediency, not historical validity, is obviously the point.

Cleon's position on the value of the deterrent example is part and parcel of his general rule that holding an empire is a matter of raw strength rather than goodwill (*eunoia*, 3.37.2). He therefore refuses to take into account the political implications of social distinctions between Mytileneans: the Athenians must not say that it was "the few" (*hoi oligoi*) who were the cause of the revolt and let the Mytilenean demos go free; the few and the many were all equally guilty of wronging us (3.39.6). Diodotus, on the other hand, urges that punishment be meted out individually, and to as few individuals as possible (3.46.3). Rather surprisingly, in light of his prior linkage of individual and state behavior, he focuses on internal social distinctions within poleis. He notes that as matters now stand, in every polis of the empire, the demos (meaning the lower class) is well disposed (*eunous*) toward Athens. As a result, if in some allied town, *hoi oligoi* initiate a revolt, they cannot count on the support of the demos, and so you (Athenians) have to *plēthos* as an ally (3.47.2). Obviously, if the Athenians treat Mytilene juridically as a single political unit, that is, punish demos and *oligoi* identically, they will lose this valuable ally. Notably, both speakers use the term "demos" in its sociological/factional sense ("lower class," not "citizenry"), and thus they reveal what Pericles' Funeral Oration attempts to conceal, the "fact" (recalling Ps.-Xenophon) that *dēmokratia* was the self-interested rule of a socially defined faction, rather than the rule of all citizens by all citizens. But Diodotus wants to use this sociological fact pragmatically in Athens' interest; Cleon, whom Thucydides has told us is the darling of the *Athenian* demos, and whose strongly egalitarian sentiments might be expected to appeal to poorer Athenians, sees no purpose in encouraging a "transnational" lower-class sociopolitical solidarity that would cut across the nationalist sentiments of polis populations.⁸⁹

The two speakers also differ on the question of whether justice has anything to do with the decision. Cleon pretends it does: his conglomerate argument

⁸⁸ For example, the well-known tradition that the early Athenian law code of Drakon entailed the death penalty for all categories of crime: Aristotle *Pol.* 1274b15–19; Plut., *Sol.* 17; cf. Gagarin, *Early Greek Law*.

⁸⁹ In books 3–5, the reader is confronted with a growing tendency for sociological distinctions between many and few, *dēmos* and *dunatoi*, to escalate into civil war. Cleon's refusal to see beyond Athens' narrowly defined self-interest and his emphasis on Athenian exceptionalism limits Athens' ability to employ *dēmokratia* as an ideological weapon, as Ps.-Xenophon suggests was standard Athenian practice; cf. Finley, *Politics*, 61, on the general tendency of ancient conquest-states to impose governments similar to their own upon subjects. Sparta saw to it that its allies were governed by oligarchies: Thuc. 1.19; Ps.-Herodes *Peri politeias* 30–31. Yet Athens did not consistently impose democracies on states within the empire, even after 427: Miletus and Chios remained oligarchic, as, perhaps, did Samos: Quinn, *Athens and Samos*, 13–23, 39–49. Athenian imperial ideology was apparently less centered on the moral superiority of democracy than on autochthony and Ionian ancestry: Loraux, *Children*; Dougherty, "Democratic Contradictions."

switches back and forth from the language of law and right (familiar from the speech of the Corinthians) to that of necessity and advantage (favored by the Corcyraeans): the Athenian empire is a tyranny, he claims, and whether it is just or unjust is irrelevant (3.37.2, 3.40.4); yet by opposing this tyranny, the Mytileneans have acted terribly unjustly, and so they deserve the general punishment demanded by righteous anger. Diodotus is quick to jump on Cleon's inconsistency: this is not a jury trial, but a policy debate, not a case in which justice and national interest go hand in hand, but one in which advantage alone deserves a hearing. Whether guilty or not, the Mytileneans are more useful to Athens alive than dead, and that should be the end of it (3.44.1–4, 3.47.5).⁹⁰

So what is the audience—either the original audience of Assemblymen or Thucydides' audience of readers—to make of all of this? The contestants in the Mytilenean Debate pose several questions that Thucydides' reader already knows are vitally important: Can a post-Periclean democracy run an empire? What is the relationship between deployment of power, domestic politics, and social diversity? What is the proper role of politicians and public debate in the democratic state? What is the relationship between an individual speaker's personal interests and the public interest? How can one determine if there is some discontinuity between public and private interests, and what should be done about it? Can prudent (in this case, restrained) policy and decisive action be reconciled? What is the appropriate basis for a future-oriented policy? How is foresight cultivated?

Arguably, the workability of democracy and the success of Athens as a great power depend on having the answers to these questions. Yet neither the speech of Cleon nor that of Diodotus gives a convincing answer to any of them. The reader is surely led to prefer Diodotus' position, by the clearly prejudicial introduction to Cleon as most violent and most influential of the public speakers, by the brutality of the policy Cleon advocates, and perhaps by the relatively greater degree of rational realism in Diodotus' arguments. Diodotus' approach of exploiting social distinctions within the allied states might be made congruent with the logic developed in the *Archaeology* and the prior narrative by assuming that Diodotus recognized that social divisions made for weakness in communities; Athens would have an easier time ruling weaker subjects. But his rhetoric is a long way from the confident integration of public speech and foreign policy that characterized Thucydides' portrayal of Themistocles and Pericles, and the reader has become very aware that there are deep social divisions in Athens, as well as in the subject states. If she is not sanguine about the chances of the cryptic and necessarily mendacious style of leadership that Di-

⁹⁰ Note, however, that Diodotus is not actually true to his own ban on arguments based on justice; see 3.47.3: if you kill the demos of Mytilene, you will act unjustly toward your benefactors. In rejecting justice/law arguments, Diodotus claims that in order to guard the state, the Athenians should not look to harsh laws (*nomoi*) but to realistic administration (*erga*, 3.46.4); the contrast between *nomoi* and *erga* is a variation on the familiar *logos/ergon* antithesis. Diodotus' argument for limiting punishment to as few of the defeated enemy as possible is recapitulated by Plato (*Rep.* 471a-b).

odotus offers his audience, she may not be surprised to find that Diodotus disappears from Thucydides' text after the debate. The unsatisfactory nature of the two speeches is reflected in the final decision: Diodotus prevailed (*ekratēse*, 3.49.1), but, Thucydides points out, the vote was very close.⁹¹

The Mytilenean Debate exposes the reality of self-interest that lies beneath the idealism of the Funeral Oration: freedom is for Athenians only, and acting in the public interest requires deception. No more fine talk about being "an education to Hellas." And, ominously, little hope that speakers like Cleon and Diodotus have anything to teach. Neither speaker has a coherent vision of the relationship between speech, action, and the material world to offer in the place of Pericles' problematic Funeral Oration idealism. We are warned in advance that Cleon is "most violent," although "best trusted by the demos" –and his speech is a masterpiece of convoluted argument that in the end is based on nothing other than the assumed validity of short-term emotional responses. We are not told by Thucydides in advance how we should react to Diodotus, but his speech is almost as unsatisfactory as Cleon's. Any reader convinced by his argument for a strict segregation of justice from advantage will have to face the consequences of that position when they are made chillingly clear by the Athenian speakers in the Melian Dialogue (below, 2.E).

The Mytilenean Debate is clearly a contest (*agōn*) of words; this is implied by Thucydides' introductory and concluding comments (*Kleōn . . . enenikēkei*, 3.36.6; *ēlthēn . . . es agōna*, 3.49.1) and is underlined by Cleon's terminology.⁹² The contest of words is reduplicated in the vivid narrative description of its material result: the race between the triremes dispatched to Lesbos –the first with a message ordering the Athenian general on Lesbos to kill the Mytileneans, the second carrying the pardon (3.49.2–4).⁹³ The nature of the debate as a contest is emphasized by Thucydides' selection for presentation of the two most-opposed arguments delivered that day, a narrative strategy that obscures the dialectical tendency of Athenian public debate. This strategy can, of course, be defended as economically presenting the reader with the full range of options open to the Assembly. Yet it also presents Assembly debate as precisely the sort of contest for audience applause that Thucydides himself has explicitly renounced as a basis for his own text, on the grounds that contestants are always more concerned with approbation than with the truth.

Each of the two contestants of the Mytilenean Debate represents himself as a concerned citizen, worried about the good of the polis. But the reader is led to ask whether these citizens are any more concerned with advocating Athens'

⁹¹ Compare Macleod, "Reason and Necessity," 99–102: "In the last analysis Diodotus, no more than Cleon, offers any protection to Athens" (100). Contrast the much more positive readings of Diodotus' speech by, e.g., Yunis (*Taming*, 99–101) and Saxonhouse (*Athenian Democracy*, 72–86).

⁹² Note the lexical similarity of *enenikēkei* to the criticism of *logographoi: epi to muthōdes enenikēkota* (above, 2.A.1). Agonal language in Cleon's speech: *agonistai*, 3.37.4; *ek tōn toiōnde agōnōn ta men athla*, 38.3; *agōnothetountes*, 38.4; *antagōnizomenoi*, 38.6.

⁹³ This desperately serious race is recapitulated in the purely agonistic trireme race as far as Aegina that launches the Sicilian Expedition: 6.32.2.

actual good than were the more honestly self-seeking Corcyraean and Corinthian ambassadors. Hence, the rhetoric of the citizen-politicians inclines in the direction of the ideal-type *antilogia* of the Corcyraean Debate. And thus, the decision-making processes of the post-Periclean democracy are implicated in Thucydides' demonstration that ideal-type speech contests cannot offer a secure grasp of realities or a secure basis for prudent policy. Ps.-Xenophon's point about self-interest seems to be affirmed, but his simplistic discussion of democracy as an efficiently immoral system of government has been replaced by a redescription of democracy as a system of decision-making by speech contests that necessarily obscure and confuse the objective facts that decision-makers must command if they are to make good policy. In both the Corcyraean and the Mytilenean debates, there was a tendency to indecisiveness on the part of the Assembly: in the first example, indecision gave way to action (a treaty was made); in the second, the decision (to spare the Mytilenean demos) led to the nullification of a previous decision and the prevention of an act. In neither case did speech lead to a strong consensus. In the third and last Athenian Assembly debate in his text, Thucydides presents the other side of the coin: a debate that initiates a decisive, daring, and popular policy.

E. DISASTROUS CONSENSUS: THE SICILIAN DEBATE

Book 6 begins: "In that . . . winter the Athenians decided . . . to sail against Sicily and, if possible, conquer it." The winter is that of 416/5; the words "that winter" refer back to the event with which book 5 ended, the Athenian invasion of the island-polis of Melos and extermination of its native population. The conquest of Melos was preceded in Thucydides' text by the peculiar "Melian Dialogue" (5.84–113), a debate between Athenian military commanders and Melos' rulers regarding the Melians' most reasonable course of action when faced with an Athenian demand that they submit to imperial control. The Athenian line of argument in the Melian Dialogue forcefully recalls the Mytilenean Debate, which had concluded with a triumph of instrumentalism: Diodotus had bested Cleon and saved most of the Mytileneans by demonstrating that the Mytilenean demos was of greater use alive than dead; by extension, the only reasonable criterion for deciding how to treat persons in Athens' power was by reference to Athenian interests. The reader is led to suppose that the volatile mix of agonistic Athenian politicians and a rudderless demos was producing ever simpler and cruder expressions of the pleonectic tendencies analyzed in the Archaeology. The Melian Dialogue starkly reveals the depth of Athenian devotion to self-interest, but in a strikingly new format. The Athenian generals, who arrived on Melos with an impressive expeditionary force, sought to negotiate a surrender before commencing a siege. But they were not allowed to address the Melian demos; Melos' oligarchs demanded that the Athenians discuss the situation in camera, with the few who ruled (5.84–85). The thinking behind the Melian oligarchs' demand is clear enough by reference to Mytilene, where the

oligarchic rulers had decided on their own to resist Athens and where the demos, once armed, immediately called for accommodation.

The discussion between the Athenian generals and the Melian oligarchs is framed not as a speech pair but as a prose dialogue—a genre Plato would seek to make his own (see below, Chapter 4). This is the only dialogue in Thucydides' text; its unique form underlines the distinctly "philosophical" argument developed by the Athenians. Like Plato's Socrates, they are concerned with the relationship between force and persuasion, they seek to prevent extraneous matters from being dragged into the discussion, and they try to demonstrate that reason alone demands a specific course of action. And yet, chillingly unlike Platonic political philosophy, the premises of the discussion forbid appeals to justice or piety, and the unequal standing of the speakers is essential to the reasoning: the conclusions of this debate will be far from the "unrefuted arguments arising from uncoerced conversation" that ideally informed the actions of the sincere Socratic. The Athenians attempt (and fail) to demonstrate to the Melians that, in light of the great inequality in power, the Melians must recognize themselves as Athenian instrumentalities, rather than as free men. The Melian oligarchs, unable to accept this redescription, refuse to surrender and express hope that they will somehow prevail. The Athenians end the discussion by reference to the key Thucydidean issue of foresight and in terms that anticipate the upcoming Athenian decision to invade Sicily: "You [Melians] seem to us quite unique in that you judge the future as something more certain (*saphestera*) than that which is before your eyes, and you view uncertainties (*taphanē*) as realities (*gignomena*), simply because you wish them to be so" (5.113). This sort of misguided hopefulness is the polar opposite of Periclean decision-making, but, as Thucydides' reader soon learns, the Melian oligarchs and the post-Periclean Athenian demos have much more in common than the Athenian generals supposed.

The Melian rulers' decision to resist led to the commencement of Athenian hostilities, which culminated in an atrocity similar to the one barely averted by the Mytilenean Debate: Melos' entire adult male population was executed, the women and children enslaved (5.116.4). The material brutality of Athenian imperial power was clearly revealed at Melos, and the renewed Athenian taste for conquest was evidently whetted by the relatively easy victory. But Sicily was not Melos. In the continuation of the sentence with which this section began, Thucydides states that "*hoi polloi* [of the Athenians] were ignorant (*apeiroi*) of the great size of the island, of the numerousness of its Greek and barbarian population, and that they were undertaking a war not much smaller than that against the Peloponnesians" (6.1.1).⁹⁴

Thucydides' narrative then digresses onto "Sicilian Antiquities"—a detailed

⁹⁴ Connor (*Thucydides*, 158–60) emphasizes the key foreshadowings of the first sentence of book 6. Mackie ("Homer and Thucydides," 103) argues that by borrowing from Homeric journey-narratives, Thucydides' focus on Athenian ignorance helps to "convey the notion that the expedition to Sicily is a kind of heroic quest into the unknown that goes disastrously wrong." On the Melian Debate, see Hudson-Williams, "Conventional Forms"; Macleod, "Form and Meaning."

description of the island's precise size, its population, and its early history (6.1.2–6.5). As in the case of the Archaeology, Thucydides' language makes it clear that not all particulars of Sicily's early history can reliably be known.⁹⁵ But, remembering Thucydides' comments on his reconstruction of early Greek history, the reader is left with the impression that his account of early Sicily is a serviceable one. As the long excursuses of the Archaeology and on Themistocles make clear, Thucydidean digressions always bear on the main argument. In this case, the digression demonstrates the true nature of the object of Athenian cupidity: "It was against such an island that the Athenians were eager (*hōr-mēnto*) to make war." Their genuine motive (*alēthestatē prophasis*), we are told, was to rule (*arxai*) the entire island, although they wanted to make it appear that they were offering aid to allies and kinsmen (6.6.1). Thucydides' sober and detailed description of Sicily contrasts sharply with the transparent duplicity and amateurish ignorance he attributes to the Athenian citizen masses.⁹⁶ Thucydides' reader now knows enough to judge the probable difficulties of a Sicilian invasion, but, as before, the source of the Athenians' knowledge about the outside world is the mix of information and misinformation offered by speakers in Assembly. By presenting the three speeches on Sicilian policy delivered by Nicias and Alcibiades in the context established by the Melian Debate and the Sicilian Antiquities, Thucydides sharpens the contrast (established in earlier Assembly-speech scenes) between his historical way of knowing the world and democratic knowledge, between his text and public speeches, between his ideal reader and the Athenian Assemblymen.

Paralleling the case of Corcyra, the origin of the trouble leading to an Assembly debate is a state (in this case, Sicilian Egesta) that has launched an attack on a neighboring polis; the neighbor has responded by allying with other states; the original aggressor in turn seeks a more powerful ally in Athens.⁹⁷ The Egestan envoys to Athens and their Athenian supporters attempted to stir up popular interest in an alliance with Egesta by raising the specter of growing Syracusan power in Sicily. The Athenians eventually dispatched a fact-finding mission (6.6.3). The Athenian envoys to Sicily returned with sixty talents of silver—enough cash, Thucydides tells his reader, to keep sixty warships afloat for a month—and with accounts of Sicilian resources that were "both encouraging and untrue" (*ouk alēthē*, 6.8.2).⁹⁸ On the basis of the cash donation and

⁹⁵ Language of uncertainty: *legontai* (6.2.1); *egō . . . oute echō eipein* (6.2.1); *hōs men eikos kai legetai* (6.2.4); *engutata* (6.4.4). Although some things do seem to be certain; on the origins of the Sikanoi: *hē alētheia heurisketai* (6.2.2).

⁹⁶ Cf. Stahl, "Speeches," 70–71. Connor (*Thucydides*, 159) points out that Athens had high hopes of dominating Sicily earlier in the war (citing 4.65.4).

⁹⁷ Rawlings (*Structure*, 58–125) notes the self-conscious similarities of the narratives in books 1 and 6.

⁹⁸ According to Thucydides' account (6.46.3–5), the envoys were fooled into supposing Egesta had vast wealth by what appears at first blush to be a remarkably silly ploy: the Egestans passed the same set of fancy tableware along to each of the houses at which the Athenian envoys were entertained. The reader may conclude that the envoys were either fools or (despite Thucydides' assurance that they had been fooled themselves) corrupt.

misinformation about the likelihood of much more to come, the Assemblymen of Athens voted to send a force of sixty ships to Sicily (6.8.2–3). Five days later, a second Assembly was held to vote on any additional material the generals appointed by the Assembly to lead the expedition felt might be necessary (6.8.2–3). Thus, as in the two earlier scenes of Assembly debate (Corcyra-Corinth and Mytilene), two meetings are involved; and once again the speakers themselves raise the key issue of democratic decisiveness.⁹⁹

E.1. Speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades

Thucydides' first speaker, Nicias, is in a peculiar situation; he had been named as one of the leaders of the expedition, but he has come to feel that the polis did not decide rightly (*orthōs*) and that the slight and specious pretext of the alliance with Egesta is inadequate to the monumental reality (*megalou ergou*) of attempting to conquer the entire island of Sicily (6.8.4). Nicias' rhetorical goal is thus similar to Diodotus': to persuade the Athenians to rescind the decree authorizing the expedition, in effect to "undo" the speech act performed at the previous meeting of the Assembly, to choose inaction over action (6.9.1). This is a tall order in light of the Archaeology's establishment of the naturalness of the impulse toward imperial expansion on the part of any state possessing the material requisites: security from attack, a naval striking force, and capital reserves. Having recovered from the effects of the plague (6.26), Athens once again seems an ideal type of the expansionist power. According to Thucydides, Pericles had been able to restrain the Athenians from untimely imperial adventures, but it is not at all clear that Nicias will be up to the Periclean standard in terms of moral authority or rhetorical finesse. Moreover, as Nicias twice acknowledges (6.9.1, 6.14), his speech is technically out of order—the agenda item under debate is the material necessities for an expedition the Assembly had already voted to dispatch, not whether or not to send an expedition in the first place.

Nicias himself is not sanguine. He admits that his *logos* is unlikely to prevail against the Athenian character (*tropoi*) and that it will be difficult to dissuade his audience from taking risks in regard to "the still-obscure future." But he nonetheless tries to teach (*didaxō*) his audience that this is not the right time for risk-taking, and that it will not be easy to accomplish that which they are eager to do (*hōrmēsthe*; 6.9.3). Nicias' language recalls Pericles' comments on speech and action in the Funeral Oration, but Nicias hopes that, "instructed by speech," the Athenians will be willing *not* to act in their accustomed dashing and daring manner.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Insightful analyses of the Sicilian Debate include Stahl, "Speeches"; Tompkins, "Stylistic Characterization"; Yunis *Taming*, 103–9; Connor, *Thucydides*, 162–68, drawing attention (162 n. 11) to the fact that in the Corinth/Corcyra, Mytilenean, and Sicilian debates alike, two meetings of the Assembly are involved in a single decision.

¹⁰⁰ Edmunds (*Chance*, 109–42) argues that Nicias is depicted as having a fatalistic "Spartan character," in contrast with Alcibiades' Athenian (and Periclean) character. While Nicias does in-

Nicias (like Cleon and Diodotus) establishes his political credentials with a claim never to have spoken in public “against his own opinion” (*para gnōmēn*, 6.9.2); rather, he has always openly advocated what he thought best for the state. He points out that he has no *personal* interest in blocking the expedition (6.9.2)—quite the contrary, since he stands to win honor as its commander, and he is personally fearless. The intended force of this statement is quite clear when the reader recalls Cleon’s and Diodotus’ comments on the potentially invidious role of personal interest in public affairs. Moreover, Nicias has set up a contrast between his own disinterested stance and his opponent Alcibiades’ intense personal interest in having the expedition sail. But ever-moderate Nicias qualifies his statement: I do, however, believe that a good citizen takes forethought for his own body and goods because this man will sincerely wish that the affairs of the polis should prosper so that his own will, too (6.9.2). This “stake in society” argument seems to be an appeal to the less overtly public-spirited men obliquely alluded to in the Funeral Oration. Like Pericles and Diodotus, Nicias hopes to show that there is no *necessary* gap between personal and public interests; but his comment undercuts the all-important contrast between himself and Alcibiades, and leaves his opponent with a deadly rhetorical counter.¹⁰¹

Much of Nicias’ speech is, by the standards set by the two previous Assembly debates, quite dry and factual, although its prose style is extraordinarily complex.¹⁰² Nicias attempts to show the Athenians that the expedition is dangerous in light of the continued antagonism of the Spartans; the plots of certain Athenians and our enemies have made the peace treaty into “merely a name” (*onoma*, 6.10.2). He correctly predicts that the treaty will not stop the Peloponnesians from attacking should Athens suffer a defeat abroad (6.10.1–4), and he echoes Pericles in urging his countrymen to avoid trying for a new empire before securing what they now hold. But, like other Assembly speakers in Thucydides’ history, Nicias also resorts to dubious arguments from probability and vague maxims: we should not fear the creation of a Syracusan empire, since it is hardly likely (*ouk eikos*) that an empire would attack another empire (6.11.3); it will impress our enemies more if we do not sail since “we all know” that people are most impressed by that which is most distant and least testable

deed resist Athenian pleonectic tendencies, this reading seems to me to slight important aspects of Thucydides’ depiction of both men. Cf. H. A. Murray, “Two Notes,” 34–35, 45, focusing on Nicias’ lack of *xunesis* and overreliance on *eutuchia*. By referring to the revoking of a decree as “undoing a performed speech act,” I am consciously casting the political process of the Assembly in terms of Austin’s theory; see above, 1.B.3. The relationship between persuasive public speech and collective action is of key importance in Pericles’ Funeral Oration (2.40.2–3) and in the Mytilenean Debate (3.38.1–4, 3.42.2).

¹⁰¹ On personal and public interests, cf. 2.37.1–3 (Funeral Oration) and 3.38.2–3, 3.40.3, 3.42.3–6 (Mytilenean Debate). The attentive reader is no more sanguine about Nicias’ chances, since Nicias had blundered rhetorically in his previous appearance in the Assembly: 4.28, with Yunis, *Taming*, 102–3.

¹⁰² See especially Tompkins, “Stylistic Characterization”; Stahl, “Speeches.”

(6.11.4).¹⁰³ Unlike Diodotus and Cleon, who abjured historical examples, Nicias attempts to buttress this last maxim by reference to Athens' own recent experience with Sparta (6.11.5). Yet he also appeals to Athenian fear of antidemocratic conspiracies: if we are soberly realistic (*sōphronoumen*), we will realize that the contest (*agōn*) is not against the barbarous Sicilians, but against Spartan plots to impose an oligarchy upon Athens (6.11.7). Thucydides' forthcoming description of Athenian hysteria over the affair of the Herm-smashers, which led to wild accusations of antidemocratic plots and resulted in the Sicilian Expedition losing its best commander, will show his readers how very dangerous this last line of argument could be.

Like the Corcyraeans, Cleon, and Diodotus, Nicias emphasizes the need to concentrate on national interests.¹⁰⁴ He argues against expending Athenian resources to help the Egestans, pointing out that their state interests lie in telling plausible untruths; they have nothing to contribute but *logoi* and will not be truly grateful for Athenian aid in any case (6.12.1). This line of argument leads naturally to his attack on Alcibiades' narrowly *personal* and *selfish* motivations (*to heautou monon skopōn*): Alcibiades hopes to profit personally from the command, but the Athenians must not endanger the polis in order that Alcibiades may appear brilliant in his private life (*idiai*). His type cheats at public administration (*ta dēmosia*) in order to squander his private goods (*ta idia*, 6.12.2). Nicias claims to fear those he sees sitting near his opponent in the Assembly; he calls upon older citizens to counter the malicious claim of Alcibiades' supporters that voting against the expedition is a sign of cowardice (6.13.1). Nicias appeals again and again to polis and *patris* (6.13–14), and in a key passage argues that forethought (*pronoia*) is the best thing for the state, intense desire (*epithumia*) the worst (6.13.1).

If Nicias' cardinal virtue (like Themistocles' and Pericles') is *pronoia*, Alcibiades is *epithumia* personified.¹⁰⁵ In Thucydides' one-paragraph introduction (6.15), Alcibiades is first called "most ardent" (*prothumotata*) for the expedition and desirous (*epithumōn*) of the generalship. His desires were greater (*epithumiais meizosin*) than his means, and eventually the demos came to believe that he lusted after (*epithumounti*) tyranny. Moreover, Thucydides confirms at least part of Nicias' accusation, by claiming that Alcibiades in fact hoped to gain personal wealth and fame from leading the expedition. But Thucydides does not seem to feel that this personal interest was necessarily bad for the state; he

¹⁰³ Other Athenian Assembly speakers' maxims: Corcyraeans (1.33.4, 1.34.3, 1.35.5), Corinthians (1.41.2–3, 1.42.2, 1.42.4), Cleon (3.37.2, 3.39.2, 3.39.5, 3.40.1), Diodotus (3.45.3–6). On the "everybody knows" topos in Athenian public rhetoric, see Ober *Mass.*, 149–50.

¹⁰⁴ National interests: Corcyraeans, 1.32.1; Cleon, 3.40.4; Diodotus 3.44.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hunter (*Thucydides*, 180) who seems to me to go too far (8–9) in arguing that "Thucydides' characters . . . are not real people at all but *mere* [my emphasis] personifications of one quality or another." Edmunds (*Chance*, 124–28) points out the ways in which Alcibiades resembles Pericles, but if so, he is a Pericles stripped of the all-important capacity for restraint of self and others. Macleod ("Rhetoric and History") and Forde (*Ambition*, 75–95, 166–69) point out some of the key distinctions between Periclean and Alcibiadean leadership and analyze Alcibiades' speech in detail.

describes Alcibiades as “in his public life the most effective (*dēmosiai kratista*) at undertaking military action.” It was, we are told, because of the affairs of his *private* life (*idiai*) that the Athenians came to fear some overweening quality in him. Thus they turned the conduct of the war over to others, and before long the polis was ruined (6.15.4). This comment, to the effect that an investigation into a citizen’s *private* life led to a disastrous rejection of his fitness for *public* duty, and with its hint that Alcibiades was simply too outstanding for the egalitarian Athenians, cuts to the heart of the Funeral Oration’s (2.37.2–3) fragile ideal of Athens’ *politeia* as a meritocracy that had no need for inquiries into the private lives of citizens.¹⁰⁶

Alcibiades begins his speech with a spirited defense of the magnificence of his private life. Grabbing the thread of Nicias’ linking of private and public interest, he unravels his opponent’s argument by evoking an Athens in which the successful risk-taker is freed from the constraints of egalitarian mores. Alcibiades trumpets the propaganda effect of his recent triple chariot-racing victory at Olympia: previously the Hellenes thought we had been ruined by the war, but as a result of my victory, the other Greeks have come to believe our *dunamis* is even greater than before. The reference to Olympia underlines the agonistic nature of the current speech competition in the Assembly, and Alcibiades confronts Nicias’ charge of self-interest head on: “It is a useful sort of folly if, by expending private means, someone profits not only himself, but also the polis” (6.16.3). Alcibiades then claims that it is not unjust (*adikon*) if someone like himself, thinking himself great, refuses to be equal (*ison*). This quite shocking (by demotic Athenian standards) demand for a status of generalized superiority is justified by an appeal to the inequality that pertained in private life: One who undergoes misfortune is not expected to share his disasters equally with others; when we’re out of luck, we don’t go out in public. So, in the same spirit, why should anyone mind being looked down on by others who are doing well? Those who disagree must be willing to give equal honor to success and failure (6.16.4), a clear absurdity. Here, like Aristophanes in the *Ecclesiazusae*, Alcibiades conflates categories usually kept carefully separate in Athenian ideology, the political (equal) and social (unequal) standing of the citizens. Yet in Alcibiades’ speech, the result, a general claim for the justice of inequality, is the diametrical opposite of the hyperegalitarian women’s regime of Aristophanes’ play. Alcibiades’ public/private conflation continues: Great men are often unpopular during their lives, but once they are dead, private citizens are eager to claim kinship with them, and the *patris* honors their memory (6.16.5).

The speaker then inserts himself in the picture. Because I desire this sort of fame, I am criticized in regard to my private affairs (*ta idia*), but look around and see if there is anyone better than myself at public administration (*ta dē-*

¹⁰⁶ The terminology of the two passages is quite similar: both use the terms *dēmosia*, *idia*, *paranomia* (*paranomoumen*), and *epitēdeumata*.

mosia).¹⁰⁷ The proof? I brought about a useful anti-Spartan alliance in the Peloponnesus that “entailed no significant danger or expense for you” (*aneu . . . kindunou kai dapanēs*, 6.16.6). This sounds good, but is it true? That will depend on how one defines a complex sequence of events. What Alcibiades describes as an “alliance” is the “plot” that Nicias claims rendered the peace treaty a mere name, too insubstantial to restrain Spartan aggression. Here is a clear example of accounts of past events being construed “according to [an] individual preference for one side or the other” (1.22.3, above, A.1); yet the Assemblyman has no way to sort out the truth of the matter, to perceive the referent behind the competing descriptions.¹⁰⁸ The careful reader will also recall the Corcyraeans’ confident and erroneous prediction that their proffered alliance would make Athens stronger “without dangers or expense” (*aneu kindunōn kai dapanēs*, 1.33.2). Yet Thucydides’ reader by now hardly needs to be prodded by the verbal echo; she should already have extracted from historical examples (e.g., Epidamnus and Corcyra) the rule that every alliance is a potential source of danger and expense, since every alliance redirects the flow of power.

Readers may be even more dubious when they come to Alcibiades’ follow-up: it was by means of appropriate *logoi* that I found a way of dealing with the *dunamis* of the Peloponnesians and, by stirring up passion (*orgē*), I won their trust (*pistis*, 6.17.1). Alcibiades’ naive confidence that *logoi* could tame *dunamis* is unlikely to persuade the reader who has gotten this far in Thucydides’ narrative, and who has learned Thucydides’ core lesson: the all-important difference between mere words and brute fact. She no longer doubts that clever speakers can stir passions in their audiences. But the blithe expectation that *logos*-inspired *orgē* could be the basis for a sound policy, especially in the context of an appeal to trust, smacks of Cleon (“most trusted” by the demos) and his demagogic appeals to righteous anger in the Mytilenean Debate (3.40.7).¹⁰⁹ However competent Alcibiades may be at military affairs, Thucydides depicts him as engaging in an extremely dangerous game in the Assembly; his military competence will be of use to the polis only if he keeps private and public interests closely aligned and channels the emotions he stirs in his listeners into sound policy over time. This will certainly not be easy.

Alcibiades then turns to “facts,” arguing “on the basis of what I hear from my informants” (*ex hōn egō akoēi aisthanomai*, 6.17.6) that the Sicilians are lightweights who will not put up much resistance: the Athenians will not be facing a big *dunamis* in Sicily (6.17.2); like all Greeks, the Sicilians falsify their numerical strength (6.17.5). Each Sicilian is just out to get what he can for himself by making clever speeches, or by stirring up a *stasis* so that he can take

¹⁰⁷ This claim is supported by Thucydides’ narrative comments on Alcibiades, 6.15.4.

¹⁰⁸ For an attempt to sort out Thucydides’ own discussion of Alcibiades’ complex diplomatic maneuvers, indicating just how hard it was to grasp the reality of those maneuvers, see Liebeschutz, “Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition,” 303.

¹⁰⁹ In Pericles’ first Assembly speech (1.140.1) and elsewhere (2.22.1), *orgē* is explicitly contrasted with *gnōmē* (qua “intelligent policy”); see Edmunds, *Chance*, 7–10, 13–14.

from the common store; if unsuccessful, he will simply move to some other land (6.17.3). This general description badly misrepresents the real Sicilians the Athenians will encounter in the actual invasion, but it could arguably be taken as a succinct (if hostile) post-eventum description of Alcibiades' own career: he is just now making a clever speech, he will soon defect to Sparta, and he will benefit by the Athenian *stasis* of 411.¹¹⁰ His current listeners are, however, blissfully ignorant of what the future holds, and foolishly willing to accept Alcibiades' words as an adequate representation of the men they will soon be fighting. Alcibiades sums up his portrayal of Sicilians by suggesting that it is hardly likely (*ouk eikos*) that such a mob (*homilos*), unable to listen to a *logos* as if with a single mind (*mia gnōmē*), will be able to engage in communal *erga* (6.17.4). By implication, if the Athenians *do* listen to him with "a single mind," if they ignore or forbid opposition, they will be able to initiate a great project in common. The dangers entailed by this line of argument will soon become apparent.

Alcibiades brushes aside the charge that the expedition will be risky, offering a specious historical analogy with the Persian Wars (6.17.7), and then fires off a string of highly questionable maxims, predictions, and arguments from history and probability (6.18.2–7): All empires were gained by helping those in need; inactivity is more risky than action; if we do not expand, we risk being conquered ourselves. Don't worry about the Peloponnesians, our sailing to Sicily will befuddle them; anyway, the expedition can have only two possible outcomes: either we conquer Hellas, or we'll hurt Syracuse and help our allies. He concludes with appeals to national unity and to Athens' innate nature: Don't be fooled by Nicias' attempt to create social unrest (*diastasis*) by appealing to the elders; let's do as our fathers did and stand united, young and old. Keep in mind that, like all things, a polis can wear out if it is inactive, but if it engages in contests (*agōnizomenēn*), it will gain experience and will be able to defend itself, not just in speech (*logōi*) but in fact (*ergōi*). A polis active by nature will ruin itself if it becomes passive, so it is better to stick to our active ways, even if they are imperfect.

The sentiment, the context, and the vocabulary all vividly recall Cleon's call for the Athenians to stick by their customs, whether they be good or bad.¹¹¹ Thucydides' readers have by now learned that one must be skeptical of this sort of oration. Not so the Athenian Assemblymen. Having heard Alcibiades' speech, they were much more eager (*hōrmēnto*) than before for the expedition (6.19.1). Nicias now made a momentous decision: since his previous argument had failed to deter the Assemblymen, he would attempt to alter their resolution

¹¹⁰ Alcibiades' defection to Sparta: 6.61, 88–93; benefits from *stasis* of 411: 8.47ff. But note that Alcibiades' comment about the tendency to falsify troop strengths echoes Thucydides in propria persona (5.68). Liebeschütz ("Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition," 296–98) suggests that Alcibiades' analysis is fairly accurate; contrast, however, Stahl ("Speeches," 72), who notes how Alcibiades' speech "creates new facts," and so the unreal becomes real and vice versa.

¹¹¹ Vocabulary: Alcibiades (6.18.7), *gignōskō* . . . *nomois* . . . *cheirō*. Cleon (3.37.3), *gnōsometha* . . . *cheiroi nomois*.

by grossly overestimating the size of the force that would be needed (6.19.2, cf. 6.24.1). By embarking on a deceitful rhetorical strategy, Nicias implicitly accepts Diodotus' "Cretan Liar" Paradox –the claim that even the best democratic politician will be unable to accomplish anything good for the polis except by deception. But in the event, Nicias' deception results in evil outcomes for Athens.¹¹²

Nicias begins his second speech by acknowledging that it is the will of the Assemblymen to sail, and he claims that he will now inform them of what is needed (6.20.1). Thucydides' readers know that this acknowledgment is insincere, and that Nicias is drifting perilously close to saying one thing in public while believing another—a form of political dishonesty, castigated by the aristocratic tradition (as well as by Cleon at 3.37.5, above 2.D), that he had proudly renounced in his previous speech. Nicias contradicts Alcibiades' overconfident assessment of the Sicilian situation: "According to what *I* hear from *my* informants (*hōs egō akoēi aisthanomai*), we will be going against poleis, many of them Greek, which are large, not at odds with one another, not likely to want a new government, nor willing to give up their freedom in order to be ruled by us" (6.20.2). By mimicking his opponent's words, Nicias initiates a contest of facts: Alcibiades' information about Sicily versus his own. Nicias supposes that he can win this contest, and thereby deflate Athenian enthusiasm.

Much of the speech (6.20.2–23.3) details the tactical difficulties the Athenian expeditionary force will encounter, an assessment that Thucydides' subsequent narrative confirms as factually correct: Sicilian cavalry will be a big factor; the Athenians cannot expect to recruit cavalry in Sicily; they might need to send home for more supplies. The money promised by the Egestans exists only in *logos*; if the Athenians don't conquer the whole island quickly, they will be surrounded by enemies. So far, this sober, fact-oriented presentation of material realia seems a model speech by Thucydidean standards. But then, at the end of the speech, comes the rhetorical kicker that Thucydides' prior discussion of Nicias' rhetorical intentions had prepared the reader to expect: the invading forces will have to be immense, but if [only if!] we do all this, I believe that there will be maximum security (*bebaiotata*) for the polis, and safety (*sōtēria*) for our soldiers (6.23.3).

E.2. Aftermath and Assessment

Nicias' seemingly clever rhetorical plan, to deter enthusiasm by means of hyperbole, backfired badly: the Assemblymen's desire (*to epithumoun*) for sailing was in no way dampened by the magnitude of the necessary preparations; the Athenians, now convinced that the expedition would be completely safe if they voted for all that Nicias demanded, became much more eager (*polu de mallon hormento*; 6.24.2). And so "a passionate lust (*erōs*) to sail burst upon everyone

¹¹² Nicias' acceptance of the "Cretan Liar" paradox: Balot, "Genealogy of Greed," ch. 4. Connor (*Thucydides*, 166–67, 237) notes the irony of Nicias' rhetorical strategy: intended to stop the dangerous expedition, it results in a larger and more vulnerable expedition.

equally” (6.24.3): the old men thought such a great *dunamis* was likely to succeed, or at least to be invulnerable; the young wanted to see wonders and felt they could do so safely; the mob (*homilos*) looked forward to military pay for the foreseeable future.¹¹³ In the feverish atmosphere, opposition was impossible: because of the intense desire (*epithumia*) of the great majority, those few who still harbored doubts dared not speak out against the expedition lest they appear traitors to the polis, and so they kept quiet (6.24.4). Born of selfish and factional interests, midwived by clever public rhetoric and ignorance, the myth of perfect unity possessed the Athenians.

The results of this erotic possession are, by turns, magnificent and horrific. The huge expedition was duly voted (6.26). The preparations completed, the entire population of Athens went down to Piraeus to witness the launching (6.30.2). There was a moment of fear, when the true riskiness of what they were doing impressed itself upon the throng, but unease gave way to confidence as the Athenians feasted their eyes upon the sight of the huge fleet (6.31.1).¹¹⁴ Thucydides lavishes superlatives on the expeditionary force, which was not only big but splendid (6.31.1–32.2). He emphasizes the moment of unity by stating that its splendor was the result of great expenditure from both public funds (*dēmosia*) and private contributions (*idia*, 6.31.5). Yet he also points out that to the other Hellenes, it seemed more a display (*epideixis*) of *dunamis* than a military expedition (6.31.4; cf. 3.16.1), and that on it rested all the hopes of the polis (6.31.6). The eventual outcome, the utter destruction of the Athenian naval and land forces in Sicily in 413 B.C., was equally great: “This accomplishment [*ergon* = the Syracusan defeat of Athens] was the greatest of the war, indeed, in my opinion (*dokein d’emoige*), the greatest in the known history of the Greeks” (7.87.5).¹¹⁵

If the destruction of the expedition is the greatest *ergon* of the war, then the decree that launched it, enacted by a collectivity possessed and artificially unified by desire, was commensurately wrongheaded.¹¹⁶ The Assembly that voted

¹¹³ On the role of *erōs* in the Sicilian Debate and its aftermath, Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, 201–20, remains fundamental. Cf. Immerwahr, “Pathology,” 27–28; and (on *erōs* in Thucydides generally) Monoson, “Citizen as *Erastes*.”

¹¹⁴ *dia to plēthos hekastōn hōn heōrōn, tēi opsei anetharsoun*. This example of the masses’ false confidence resulting from *seeing* demonstrates that (contrary to the traditional assumption of poets and *logopoioi*: e.g., *Od.* 8.491; Hdt. 1.40, with Steiner, *Tyrant’s Writ*, 105) visual perception can be just as misleading as verbal persuasion. Cf. Stahl, “Speeches,” 73–74; Immerwahr, *Ergon*; Brittan, “History, Testimony.” The inability of visual perception alone to overcome the illusions of speech within the context of the democratic regime is an important issue for the Athenian critical community; it recurs in Aristophanes, and in Plato’s epistemology.

¹¹⁵ The location of this *edokei moi*-type construction in the sentence fits the methodological scheme Thucydides laid out in the proem. It was, according to Thucydides’ categories, a demonstrable *fact* that the defeat was the greatest *ergon* of the war. But since ancient history is knowable only by inference, it can only be his (informed) *opinion* that this was the greatest *ergon* of all Greek history.

¹¹⁶ Cf., however, 6.47–50: victory in Sicily seems possible; 2.65.11: Thucydides’ claim that the Athenian error was not so much ignorance about what to expect in Sicily (*ou tosouuton gnōmēs harmatēma ēn pros hōus epēisan*) as a failure by those at home in Athens to support the expedition.

for the expedition not only fulfilled what everyone believed about the Athenian character (daring and active), it came to resemble Alcibiades himself. If Alcibiades embodies *erōs* and *epithumia*, at the vital Assembly the Athenians became a collectivity whose decision-making process was driven by desire and lust. There is a strong sexual undertone to Thucydides' language in this scene, and Alcibiades was (to his contemporaries and to subsequent Greek literature) a sexy character. But Thucydides' reader is not encouraged to suppose that it was simply a case of the seduction of an innocent demos by a conniving Alcibiades. Thucydides has described Alcibiades as the most capable man of his era in regard to military affairs, but he depicts Alcibiades himself as caught up by and ultimately a victim of the passions aroused by Assembly debate. It is the demos' volatile reactions to what they heard, not the speakers' actual intentions, that ultimately determined Athenian policy.

The incapacity of the speaker's intention to determine outcomes in post-Periclean democratic Athens is underlined by Thucydides' clear implication that Nicias' speeches were responsible for much of the general lust. The verb that traces the upward spiral of Athenian enthusiasm is *hormaō*, "to be eager to initiate an affair."¹¹⁷ The Athenians do not seem especially mad for the expedition before the speech contest of the second Assembly, a meeting that was called simply to iron out the administrative details of sending out a moderate-sized sixty-ship mission. It is Nicias who willfully rekindled the general debate (6.14). It is Nicias, in his first speech, who describes the Athenians as "eager to initiate" (6.9.3) the expedition; after his second speech, they are "much more eager" (6.24.2). By his violent personal attack on Alcibiades, Nicias ensured (6.15.2) that his opponent would make the reply that made the Assemblymen "much more eager than before" (6.19.1). Rather than cutting his losses after the success of his opponent's speech, Nicias decided to act against both the general will and his own character, by challenging his enemy directly in a rhetorical contest. In his second speech, Nicias abandons "his own genuine opinion" in favor of an overclever rhetorical strategy that feeds the flames of popular enthusiasm.

The construction of the scene suggests that Nicias, an excellent and moral man (as Thucydides informs his readers in an uncharacteristically explicit judgment, 7.86.5),¹¹⁸ was deluded by the agonistic context of the democratic deci-

This latter claim is contradicted by Thucydides' narrative; see Gomme, in *HCT*, ad loc. Liebeschütz ("Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition," 299–306) and Bloedow ("Alcibiades: A Review," 22–24, with literature cited) conclude, I think rightly, that Thucydides leads the reader to suppose the expedition was a major error. Contrast Pope, "Thucydides and Democracy," 287–88.

¹¹⁷ See above: 6.6.1, 6.9.3, 6.19.1, 6.24.2. The chronological context of 6.6.1 (*hoi Athēnaioi strateuēin hōrmēnto*) seems to be after the second Assembly, but before the launching of the expedition.

¹¹⁸ Westlake (*Individuals*, 209–22) points out the uniqueness of Thucydides' tribute to Nicias and regards Nicias as the most tragic character in the *History*. Contrast Edmunds (*Chance*, 140–42) arguing that Thucydides' "opinion of Nicias was negative" and that the judgment of 7.86.5 "bears on the sort of death that Nicias met and is not a reflection on the goodness or badness of this career." H. A. Murray ("Two Notes") sums up earlier literature on the passage, opting for an ironic

sion-making process into the self-betrayal that would destroy both himself and Athens' power. Nicias' strategy in his second speech was based on the assumption that the Assemblymen recognized a distinction between words and facts. His rhetorical bluff required that his own words call to mind an external reality of expensive material necessities. He imagined that the overeager Athenians would be sobered by a confrontation with the facts (huge expense, tactical difficulties) to which his words referred. But he thereby neglected to take into account the factor that is central to Thucydides' critical narrative: in the context of the Assembly, language was less referential than performative; the Assembly was a battleground of speech in which words were, through felicitous speech performances (i.e., the enactment of decrees), transmuted into social and political realities. In their passion, the Athenians were quite willing to call Nicias' bluff by performing the speech act that would create the great *dunamis* he demanded. The Funeral Oration ideal, which elides the difficulty of moving from political speech in a democracy to effective action, here reaches its telos: speech becomes more than just a spur to action; with the enactment of the decree authorizing the great expedition, speech is isomorphic with action. The distinction between words and facts melts away with predictably (in Thucydides' realm) bad results. Neither lucky Nicias nor capable Alcibiades is able to control the course of events.

Thucydides' explanation of why Alcibiades' appeal to unity and Nicias' hyperbole fanned the fires of public desire is implicit in his depiction of how the Assembly "processed" the knowledge presented in verbal arguments. In the debates over Corcyra and Mytilene, the Assemblymen were forced to choose between two positions. Thucydides' text suggests that in neither case was the final choice completely rational, since the Assemblymen had no independent means of judging or testing the accuracy of each speaker's factual statements. But Thucydides also showed that even self-interested speeches contained some truth, and so the decisions made by the Assembly did not *necessarily* result in bad outcomes.¹¹⁹ The Sicilian Debate might have followed the same scenario. Nicias tries to refute Alcibiades' facts with his own better facts, but in this case, the Athenians refuse to choose between the two competing descriptions of external reality. They solve the political/epistemological dilemma posed by Thucydides—democratic decision-making as typically based on misinformation because of the agonistic nature of Assembly debate—by rejecting contradiction and combining Alcibiades' argument that there must be an expedition with Nicias' argument that it must be almost impossibly huge. They are still, as Thucydides told us at the beginning of the scene, ignorant of the realities of Sicily, but through their speech act, they have created an imaginary Sicily as an

reading, which need not preclude either negative or positive assessments of Nicias' career as a whole. Allison ("Homeric Allusions," 514) points out that "strong Homeric echoes at the close of the Sicilian narrative underline the tragic lesson." Cf. above, 2.n.94.

¹¹⁹ Truth, that is, as judged by conformity to the *erga*, or to Thucydides' own interpretation: e.g., the Corcyraeans predict the coming war and identify Spartan fear (*phobos*) of Athenian power as the prime cause (1.33.3); Corinthians predict that Athens' allies will revolt (1.40.6).

opponent for the imagined Demos. This imaginary Sicily is not big enough or strong enough to threaten the great *dunamis* that the Assemblymen have called into being by the authorizing decree. As Thucydides' analysis of empire formation in the Archaeology has already suggested, in a condition of perfect security, imperialistic expansionism may seem the only realistic policy. There is no insightful and rhetorically authoritative Pericles on the scene to deflate Athenian overconfidence with carefully chosen words. Instead, in Alcibiades' dangerously optimistic and exclusionary formulation, the only outcomes the Athenians can foresee are the conquest of Hellas, or helping their friends and hurting their enemies.

The result of this false solution to the problem of *logos* and *ergon* is that the Athenians become (in Alcibiades' words) a being with a single mind (*mia gnōmē*) and a single purpose, a being that embodies the ideological dream of an end to all the complex contradictions, distinctions, and uncertainties that led to political friction. The idealizing discourse of Pericles' Funeral Oration is actualized: the *agōn* of politics becomes a love feast where "everybody wins."¹²⁰ Individual self-interest and desire to excel unites with the public good. Social unequals and political equals, the many and the few, old and young, dissolve into an ideological "all." The future is no longer unknown because the huge *dunamis* called into existence by the Assembly's decree has transmuted uncertainty into a sure thing. Justice and expediency go hand in hand because the Athenians will help their Sicilian allies through the self-serving act of conquering Sicily. The demos, freed from the braking tendency of sociopolitical friction, driven by desire, impatient with delay, is angered by any hint that contradictions or impediments remain. This unity is of course false. But it is highly dangerous to oppose the consensus in public, and so all critics of unanimity are gagged; political dissent loses its voice when faced by the hegemonic will of the mass of citizens.

The tragic outcome is practically foreordained. Given the context of lust, misinformation, selfish individual interest, false pretexts, outright lies, corrupt rhetoric, and suppression of dissent in which the decision was made, it would be a great stroke of luck (*eutuchia*, invoked by both Alcibiades, 6.17.1, and Nicias, 6.23.3) for all to go well. But Athenian luck has run out. The expedition, constructed out of false words and personal interests, crashes into the complex and harsh realities of war in the real world, and sinks. Fragile consensus, predicated on misleading speech, devolves into the terrible reality of the *stasis* described in book 8.¹²¹ Books 6 and 7, with their detailed and vivid descriptions of the initial successes, subsequent crumbling, and final collapse of the Athenian expeditionary force in Sicily, present Thucydides' strongest case

¹²⁰ Athenian ideal of consensus: above, n. 37. *Mia gnōmē*, vel sim. in (later) Athenian rhetoric: Demosthenes 19.298; Dinarchus 1.99; Andocides 2.1; Lysias 2.13, 17, 24; Aeschines 3.208.

¹²¹ As in the case of the Mytilenean revolt, the Athenians initially refused to believe the reports of disaster in Sicily, and they subsequently turned against the orators, as Thucydides drily notes, as if they themselves had not voted for the expedition: 8.1.1, with Stahl, "Speeches," 76. Cf. Eco, *Theory of Semiotics*, 66: death, having occurred, is the one thing that cannot be semiotized.

for the priority of *erga* over *logoi* and for the instability of error-prone democracy when it is reenvisioned as government by competing speeches.

Thucydides' presentation of the Sicilian Expedition Debate and his narrative of the launching of the expedition suggest that unity of purpose, resulting from the collapse of the distinctions celebrated in the Funeral Oration, made possible the unleashing of Athens' full *dunamis* in the post-Periclean polis. But that *dunamis* would be effective in the real world only if unity could be preserved. A great military force could be called into being by a democratic speech act performed at a moment of erotic union of opposites. But the effective deployment of military force depended on the close control of power and its projection against suitable objects. In democratic Athens, that in turn required the maintenance of genuine political unity over a long span of time. For the great expedition to succeed, political unity must exist in fact, not just in name.

As it happened, sociofactional disunity and political friction resurfaced soon after the Sicilian expedition vote. Immediately following his description of the second Assembly, Thucydides states that one night, while preparations for the expedition were well under way, most of the sacred Herms of the city were defaced—both those located outside private houses and those in sacred places (6.27.1). The discovery of the vandalism led to a huge outcry. The Assembly passed a decree offering rewards for any information regarding this or any other sacrilegious act. The whole affair was taken as a bad omen for the expedition, and it was irrationally regarded as part of a plot to overthrow the democracy (6.27.2–3). Meanwhile, in a separate incident, quickly related in the popular imagination with the first, Alcibiades was accused of sacrilege (in this case, profaning the Eleusinian Mysteries) by various scheming politicians who regarded him as an impediment to their own leadership of the demos. His enemies claimed that Alcibiades was a participant in a general plot to overthrow the democracy; to back up their charges, they attacked the excesses of his private life as being incompatible with demotic values (*ta epitēdeumata ou dēmotikēn paranomian*, 6.28.1–2). Although the charges were not brought before a magistrate at the time, they were revived after the departure of the expedition. The result was Alcibiades' conviction in absentia on legal charges of impiety, his defection to Sparta, and the drift into leaderless chaos of the expedition he had advocated so persuasively.¹²²

The affair of the Herms and its aftermath marked the quick transition from the false unity of the Sicilian Expedition Debate to the intensification of now-familiar factional and personal-interest-oriented political contests within Athens. Moreover, the reader now realizes just how destructive to the state interest those contests actually were. This time it is not only imperial subjects or would-be neutrals who will suffer as a consequence of the Athenian lust for power and the democratic inability to control that power. The hapless Athenian citizen-soldiers sailed to their deaths in Sicily, and the survivors at home were

¹²² Murray, "Affair of the Mysteries," and Furley *Andokides and the Herms*, offer detailed analyses of the affair in its cultural and political contexts.

catapulted into *stasis* by the news of the disaster. Athenian factionalism and inability to exert power in consistently rational ways are the context for Thucydides' summing-up of why Athens lost the war (2.65.10–12; discussed above, 2.C.4): Pericles' political successors, eager to please the demos, lost control of affairs. In a great imperial polis, this loss of control naturally led to mistakes like the Sicilian Expedition. Because the politicians were too busy with their personal disputes over leadership of the demos, they allowed the expedition to lose impetus, and through their quarrels with one another, they introduced confusion into the affairs of the polis.

As we have seen, in his summation of why Athens lost the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides states that during the era of Pericles' leadership, Athens was a democracy only in *logos*, but in *ergon* it tended to be the rule of the first man (2.65.9). In light of the prior and subsequent narrative, this amounts to a straightforward denial of the ability of a genuine democracy either to become or to stay truly great. The reader is led to suppose that Pericles (and Themistocles before him), as sole true decision-maker, was able to direct the flow of Athenian power, and that he successfully merged its various aspects—*kratos*, *archē*, and *dunamis*—just as he balanced internal policy and international relations. Power, in the days of Pericles, was potentially destructive, but it was channeled to rational pro-Athenian ends. Moreover, under this schema, the material base of Athenian *dunamis* can be divorced from genuinely democratic political processes. Since under his regime Athens was not fully democratic in reality, Pericles was able to build up the huge resources that helped sustain Athenian *dunamis* even after his death. These resources were shamefully squandered once democracy came to exist in fact; the impotent magnificence of the Sicilian Expedition is the proof. Without Periclean foresight and a firm guiding hand, Athenian power could no longer be aimed at the proper targets, could not be controlled or channeled, and so destroyed its possessors.

The implied inverse of Pericles as sole ruler, then, is that after Pericles' death, *dēmokratia* existed as an *ergon*, and that this led to disaster. Having read this far in the narrative, Thucydides' reader now understands what that implies. Real *dēmokratia* meant that it was democratic knowledge, rather than the wise council of the statesman, that undergirded decisions about state policy. As a result, decisions were predicated on speech contests rather than on fact and foresight. Speech contests were not just sparked by bad politicians, they were the result of, and in turn exacerbated, the selfishness and social factionalism that remained latent under the Periclean regime.¹²³ As the contests became fiercer, there was a growing tendency for speaker and audience alike to confuse political enactment with reality. In Thucydides' text, the public performance of a speech act in the democratic polity does not felicitously call into being socio-political realities, it evokes a false and fragile simulacrum of reality that is

¹²³ For an explanation of why Athenian greed did not disturb the internal Athenian social order in the period between the Persian Wars and the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, see Balot, "Genealogy of Greed."

shattered by its inevitable collision with the brute facts that lurk “out there” in the world. Pericles’ inferior successors, whether good (Nicias) or bad (Cleon), necessarily competed through public speech for the “leadership” of the demos—a leadership that the text reveals as the spurious privilege of using lies in order to persuade the demos to enact fictions. These fictions were dangerous, both because the contests reflected and inflamed the selfish ambitions of individuals and social factions, and because they involved a mighty *dunamis* and the communal *kratos* wielded by a numerous and increasingly willful demos, a demos that tended to confuse ideology with truth and political speech with reality. When this *kratos* was unleashed by a speech contest that resulted in a brief but intense sense of unity, Athens’ *dunamis* was misdirected and lost in Sicily, and Athens fell into the *stasis* of 411/10.

Here, with the apparent demise of *dēmokratia* as a stable and confident political culture for a great imperial state, Thucydides’ text abruptly ends. His critical argument, if not his intended historical narrative of the twenty-seven-year war (5.26.1), is complete. The text as we have it seemingly empirically demonstrates the validity of his critical method, by showing how and why the linkage between democratic knowledge and imperial power led to the destruction of both Athenian political life and Athenian *dunamis*. It is, however, worth noting that Thucydides’ critical project, deeply compelling and chilling as a *logos*,¹²⁴ was not fully sustained by the *erga*. *Dēmokratia* bounced back after 411 and again after 404; Athens rebuilt its military power both times; and the conflict with Sparta lasted a good deal longer than twenty-seven years. Thucydides certainly knew a good deal of this history; he lived to see the Athenian surrender of 404 B.C. and returned to Athens from exile shortly thereafter (5.26.5). Unless he died during the reign of the Thirty, he also must have known of the democratic restoration of 403, with its startling denouement in the *stasis*-halting Amnesty Decree.¹²⁵

In any event, Thucydides’ critical history of Athenian popular rule was quickly confronted by an apparent contradiction. The text as we have it demonstrates brilliantly why and how a democracy can degenerate under conditions of stress, but it offers the reader few resources for explaining a subsequent period

¹²⁴ The Thucydidean account of Periclean (pseudo-) democratic leadership is quite frequently taken as a model for the actual relationship between speaker and audience in the Athenian Assembly; see, recently, Kallet-Marx, “Money Talks.” This equation leads, in my view, to a distorted understanding of the historical democracy at work.

¹²⁵ The last years of the twenty-seven-year war, and the ongoing conflict between Sparta and Athens in the 390s and 380s, are recounted by Xenophon (*Hellenica*); cf. Strauss, *Athens*; Cartledge, *Agasilaos*. Reign of the Thirty: Krentz, *Thirty*. Amnesty decree: Loening, *Reconciliation*. Chronology of Thucydides’ return from exile: Gomme and Andrewes, in *HCT* 4: 11–14. I offer no opinion on the extent of Thucydides’ postwar revisions of his text, a major issue for those concerned with composition; see, for example, de Romilly, *Thucydides*, 349–54. On the question of whether Thucydides survived into the 390s, see the contrasting views of Pouilloux and Salviat, “Thucydide,” with Flory, “Death of Thucydides”; Cartledge, “New Lease” (disposing of the major epigraphical prop for the thesis that he did).

of rapid internal democratic amelioration. If, having completed her study of the history, Thucydides' fourth-century reader now believes that she understands the processes by which Athens shook itself apart, she remains at a loss to explain how the shattered fragments of a polis were so quickly reassembled under the apparently discredited aegis of *dēmokratia*, and in the absence of a leader in the Periclean mold. In sum, the historical facts of democratic Athenian resilience after the crises of 411 and 404 cannot easily be accommodated within the critical/theoretical framework that the author introduced at the beginning of the text and developed in his presentation and analysis of Athenian Assembly speeches.

Because of its vulnerability to challenges on the empirical basis of subsequent historical realities, a political theory that claimed to explain the probable future on the basis of accurate knowledge about the recent past was, at least in the middle term of the fourth century B.C., a flawed vehicle for literary resistance to Athenian democratic ideology. As a definitive criticism of democratic practice, Thucydides' text, for all its brilliance, fell short of the mark for a dissident Athenian readership confronted by a restored democratic order. Thucydides offered a masterful demonstration of why, given its public deliberative and decision-making practices, Athenian-style democracy should have suicided in a protracted Corcyra-like *stasis* in the long aftermath of the Sicilian disaster. Yet in the real world—the phenomenal world of facts that Thucydides had chosen as his playing field and tried to make his own through a carefully constructed *logos*—democratic practice seemed (at least for some eighty years after the end of the Peloponnesian War) triumphant.

It is important to keep in mind that criticism of Athenian democracy was not the sum of Thucydides' ambition or accomplishment. Thucydides' historical vision remained very influential in the fourth century and beyond; Xenophon, for example, wrote a political narrative that began just at the point Thucydides' own narrative had broken off.¹²⁶ Yet other Athenian critical writers saw that the solution to the political *aporia* defined by Ps.-Xenophon's *Political Regime of the Athenians* was not to be found in the evolving practices of Greek historiography, and they turned to literary genres less firmly grounded in accurate descriptions of the phenomenal world. But a key Thucydidean insight, that the "social facts" established by the felicitous performance of democratic speech acts were not constitutive of reality properly so understood, continued to motivate Athenian critical literature. Aristophanic comedy offers a striking example of how that insight might be reconfigured within a very different genre and presented to a much broader Athenian audience.

¹²⁶ For Thucydides' continuators and his influence on fourth-century thought, see Dillery, *Xenophon*, 9–11; and summaries in Gomme, "Thucydides and Fourth-Century Thought"; Hornblower, "Fourth-Century and Hellenistic Reception," 50–51.

Essence and Enactment: Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae*

A. COMIC THEATER AS POLITICAL CRITICISM

Aristophanes' comedy *Ecclesiazusae* (Assemblywomen) was produced in the late 390s B.C.—a dozen years after the end of the Peloponnesian War, the oligarchy of the Thirty, and the restoration of democracy.¹ Like all classical Athenian dramas, it was written for production at a major civic festival (the City Dionysia or the Lenaea). As far as the playwright knew (at least at the time of writing), the play would be presented a single time: in the Athenian Theater of Dionysus as one event among many (including—in the case of the City Dionysia—tragedies, comedies, satyr plays, dithyrambic choruses) in an annual, state-sponsored festival. But if the play's "run" would be limited, the audience was very large, perhaps as many as 17,000 persons. Most (though not necessarily all) of those in the audience were Athenian citizens, and all classes and social statuses of citizens were likely to be represented: rich and poor, urban aristocrat and yeoman farmer, educated and illiterate. It is quite possible that at least some Athenian women attended, as did some foreigners (at the City Dionysia). The plays were judged by a panel of citizens selected by lot from the members of the audience; the best comedy was awarded a prize by the judges, who certainly took the audience's response as a primary criterion of excellence. The winning playwright was publicly honored.²

As recent discussions of Greek drama have emphasized, Athenian tragedy and comedy were written and performed as integral parts of a sophisticated and complex civic ritual. For the Athenians, the theater was a public space—the physical layout of the theater was closely analogous to that of the ordinary Assembly place on the Pnyx; indeed, Assembly meetings were sometimes held in the theater itself. All plays produced in the Theater of Dionysus were spon-

¹ Greek text, with introduction, and commentary: Ussher, *Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae*. Translation, with introduction and notes: Henderson, *Three Plays*. On the date of the play (392 or 391), see Ussher, *ibid.*, xx–xxv; Funke, *Homónoia*, 168–71; Strauss, *Athens*, 183 n. 85; David, *Aristophanes*, 1 n. 2; MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens*, 302–3. Preliminary versions of some of the ideas developed here appeared in Ober and Strauss, "Drama," 264–69.

² Theater of Dionysus and seating (known archaeologically from the remodeling of the 330s): Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre*, esp. 140–41, and *Dramatic Festivals*, 263; Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary*, 537–52. Presence of Women in the audience: Podlecki, "Could Women Attend?" (maybe); Henderson, "Women and the Athenian Dramatic Festivals" (probably); Goldhill "Representing Democracy" (probably not). Judging and award of prizes: Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 95–100. That the crowd noise influenced judges is confirmed by Aristotle's (*Pol.* 1281b7–10; below, 6.C.2) comment that the masses collectively are the best judges of drama; cf. Plato *Laws* 659a–c, with Wallace, "Poet."

sored by the polis; the audience watched dramatic productions as part of a religious festival that had much to do with civic self-representation. As in the Assembly, the demos in the theater was both spectator and judge of virtuoso verbal performances. Like the Athenian orator, the Athenian playwright attempted to win the acclaim and approval of a crowd, and the reaction of the assembled throng was essential to the success of the performance. Thus, classical Athenian dramas meant something to the original audience of citizens that is necessarily quite different from what they have meant to all subsequent audiences and readers—from Hellenistic revivals to the present. Athenian plays can unquestionably be appreciated aesthetically in isolation from their original civic context, but they are explicable historically (and thus useful for a history of Athenian political discourse) only when viewed against the civic context within which and for which they were written. That context, informed as it was by democratic knowledge, has an important bearing on the issue of how comedy worked as a form of political criticism.³

A.1. *The Comic Poet and His Critical Genre*

Ps.-Xenophon (2.18) devotes a paragraph to the function of comedy in the democratic polis. His main point is that it is the Athenians as a collectivity (not the poet as an individual) who determine the critical content of comedy, and “they” decide who may and who may not be made fun of in the theater:

They do not permit the demos to be slandered in order that they should not hear ill of themselves. But if [a comic poet] wishes to mock any individual person (*idiai*), they bid him to do so, knowing full well that he who is made a comic butt (*kō-mōidomenos*) will not usually be one of the demos or of the *plēthos*, but a rich or wellborn or powerful man. Some few of those mocked in comedy are poor and demotic, but only if they have been meddling in public affairs (*dia polupragmosunēn*) or seeking to elevate themselves above the demos so that [the Athenians] feel no vexation at seeing such people portrayed as comic butts.

Ps.-Xenophon’s claim that the Athenian demos suppressed mockery of itself in comedy is, I believe, adequately refuted by Aristophanes’ surviving plays—notably by the *Knights* (424 B.C.), in which “Mr. Demos of Pnyx” is lampooned with great gusto. But Ps.-Xenophon’s claim that those mocked are typically rich, wellborn, or powerful men is certainly sustained by the evidence, and his

³ The bibliography on Attic drama as civic ritual is large and growing quickly; see, for example, the essays collected in Winkler and Zeitlin, *Nothing to Do with Dionysos?*; Sommerstein, *Tragedy, Comedy, and the Polis*; Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*. On the civic contexts of comedy, Henderson, “*Dēmos* in the Comic Competition,” remains fundamental; Carey, “Comic Ridicule,” surveys recent work. Nightingale, *Genres*, 180–85, offers a succinct discussion with special reference to comedy as a critical “political voice.” Relationship between Assembly and theater: Ober and Strauss, “Drama.” Recent work on Greek drama should be situated in the context of a paradigm shift in scholarly attitudes toward historical relations between elite culture and popular audiences; see, for example, Lawrence W. Levine et al., “Forum [on cultural history],” *American Historical Review* 97 (1992): 1369–1430.

assumption that it is the demos, rather than the individual playwright, that determines the tenor and targets of comedy should serve to warn modern interpreters of “the politics of Attic comedy” not to focus exclusively on the playwright’s idiosyncratic opinions.⁴

It is surely safe to say that Aristophanes had his own personal views about Athenian democratic politics as well as about individual politicians and policies. In common with many other Athenians (and, by definition, with all members of Athens’ critical community), he surely thought some of the policies adopted by the Assembly to be foolish or misguided. Like many of his fellow citizens, he genuinely disliked some individual Athenian politicians (whether for reasons of policy or personality) and tended to distrust “professional” politicians as a class. It seems equally certain that Aristophanes’ individual views and tastes were to some degree reflected in the plays he wrote: the counterargument (that he either could have or would have utterly divorced his personal views from his literary productions) is chimerical. When making fun of Athenian politicians, he appears to be harder on “radicals” like Cleon than he is on “conservatives” like Nicias. But that said, Aristophanes’ individual political views simply cannot be determined with the degree of specificity necessary for a reading of his plays based primarily on those views to be either useful or meaningful as intellectual history. Aristophanes’ *personal* intentions in writing are not fully recoverable because they can never be separated (perhaps not even by the poet himself) from the constraints of the comic genre, or from the generalized critical intentions implicit within Aristophanes’ role as a writer of comic poetry.⁵

Athenian comedy’s status as an established public genre imposed certain formal constraints on the individual poet. The consumers of comedy—imprimis, the large and vocal Athenian audience—expected certain sorts of songs, dances, and choral interludes, a certain set of poetic meters to be observed, and

⁴ Halliwell, “Comic Satire,” reviews the evidence for Athenian legal restraints on comic free speech, concluding that restraints were minimal and historically contingent. On the *Knights* as political comedy, and the particularly fierce attack on the undoubtedly rich and powerful (if not “wellborn”) Cleon, see Edmunds, *Cleon*, “*Knights*.” Rather than suppose that the production of the *Knights* helps to date Ps.-Xenophon’s text, I would tend to read Ps.-Xenophon’s comments on comedy in the context of the *agōn* among political critics, discussed above, 1.C.1. On Aristophanes’ politics, see note 5 below.

⁵ Useful and meaningful: Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 13–17. Sommerstein (“Aristophanes,” 315–19) argues effectively against those who have seen *Ecclesiazusae* as an “ironic” attack on communalization; yet Sommerstein’s thesis (the new order is inspired by a change in Aristophanes’ personal fortunes and sympathy for the peasants, downtrodden by the war) seems to me excessively biographical. Segal, “Introduction,” xv–xvi, surveys modern debates over Aristophanes’ personal beliefs. In my view, the objections raised by Gomme (“Aristophanes and Politics,” first published in 1938) against interpretive approaches to comedy based primarily on an assumption that the comic poet’s personal political views are knowable and worth knowing remain valid, although his approach to the question now seems dated. For spirited replies to Gomme, see Ste. Croix, *Origins*, app. 29, with Cartledge, *Aristophanes*, 43–53. Henderson, *Three Plays*, 11–14, is a balanced update.

so on.⁶ A brilliant comic poet, such as Aristophanes, pushed at the boundaries of the formal restraints of the genre. But if he stepped too far beyond the accepted borders, his verses would no longer be recognized by his audience as comedy. The Athenians were willing to tolerate a good deal of experimentation, but there were limits to what they would accept as drama—either comic or tragic.⁷ Aristophanes had to seek approval and public funds to produce each of his plays from the democratically appointed archon, the magistrate (chosen by lot) responsible for selecting dramas for production.⁸ If Aristophanes' plays were generically unrecognizable as comedies, those plays would not be produced by the polis, and there was no "off Broadway" for the Attic dramatist.

If we assume that comedy played an important, well-established, and recognized role in the civic life of the city, we must also suppose (with Ps.-Xenophon) that the Athenian demos' general and collective intentions regarding the civic and educational functions of comic poetry in the democratic polis acted as a related set of stimuli and constraints in the writing of every Attic comedy. The evidence of the corpus of surviving comedies (and fragments), which are consistently critical of the social and political status quo, strongly suggests that the Athenians intended for the comic poet to help educate the citizenry by serving as a social and political critic. Because of this public expectation (enforced by the archon's preliminary selection, the audience's reaction, and the awarding of prizes), the comedian's critical role was institutionalized within the democratic regime. Aristophanes, like all Athenian comic poets, wrote in a civic context and about the social and political lives of the Athenians. His audience and judges (the demos and its lotteried representatives) expected him to exercise an extreme form of the citizen's privilege of free speech, to search out and to expose to public view things that were ordinarily hidden or tacitly ignored by the rest of the citizenry. The fact that Aristophanes had a long and successful career suggests that he fulfilled those expectations.⁹

Comic revelations included aspects of ordinary life normally regarded by the Athenians as private—not only sexual misbehavior and scatology, but also (for example) the interests and desires of women and slaves. Yet even more to the present point, the comic poet/critic was expected to expose the ideological framework of political life—to reveal the inner workings of democratic knowledge itself. In making this framework manifest, the playwright exposed contradictions within and between the array of mythic constructions that underpinned the Athenian "regime of truth." Contrary, then, to one of Ps.-Xenophon's

⁶ Comedy as a genre and its conventions: Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*; Parker, *Songs of Aristophanes*.

⁷ For a discussion of how far the limits might be pushed, see, for example, Zeitlin, *Playing the Other*, 375–416.

⁸ The process of selecting plays: Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 84–86.

⁹ Aristophanes' career lasted from roughly 427 to 386; eleven plays survive intact, along with considerable fragments and titles of another thirty-two lost plays. Chronological list of Aristophanes' plays and prizes: K. J. Dover, in *OCD*³, 164.

claims, the Athenian demos clearly intended comic poets both to mock prominent men *and* to expose the demos' tendency to self-deception. It was by confronting the artifices of a political system that indeed tended to naturalize the performative practices of public life that the Athenian citizen was educated by comedy. Accordingly, whatever his own views, Aristophanes was generically an "internal" critic of the democratic regime. Indeed, he was in effect hired by the regime to encourage the demos to laugh at its leaders and itself, and in so doing he helped to educate the citizenry. Comic lessons were seldom simple prescriptions or actual recommendations to "adopt that policy" or "vote this way" on a given decree. But the critical exaggerations of comedy might indeed take the form of warnings and admonitions: If "we Athenians" continue down this seemingly straight and sunny path, we may soon find ourselves lost in a labyrinth of our own devising.¹⁰

A.2. *A Retreat from Politics?*

Until quite recently, *Ecclesiazusae* had a generally bad reputation among modern scholarly readers. When it was judged by the ordinary standard of the pre-war plays, it seemed sadly wanting in coherence, high spirit, and humorous critique of politicians' foibles.¹¹ Some scholars have attempted to explain what "went wrong" with the play by suggesting that after the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes gave up emphasizing the political concerns that marked his earlier works. On this reading, *Ecclesiazusae* is not really political at all, but an ironic or absurdist fantasy. The argument for why *Ecclesiazusae* seems different from the wartime plays can be made in terms of the poet's own changing attitudes, or the postwar climate of opinion, or the evolution of the comic genre itself. Attic comedy is traditionally subdivided into Old Comedy (blatantly political) and

¹⁰ On comedy as self-consciously didactic, see Foley, "Tragedy and Politics"; Rothwell, *Politics and Persuasion*, 18; Cartledge, *Aristophanes*, 29–31 (noting precedents in earlier Greek poetry). Saïd ("L'Assemblée des femmes," 34) argues that *Ecclesiazusae* is more profoundly critical than earlier comedy in its relative lack of interest in individual politicians and consequently greater focus on the demos itself. I tend to agree, but it is worth noting the frequency with which education plays a major role in earlier plays (e.g., *Clouds*, *Frogs*). The play's didactic intention is explicit in an aside to the audience (1155–56): the chorus-leader says that wise persons (*sophoi*) should judge the play according to the wise things said, whereas those who like humor should judge it by its humor. This need not refer to two discrete categories of spectator; each member of the audience might be expected to enjoy the play on two levels: as humor and as revelatory political criticism. Cf. *Eccel.* 6ff., on the lamp that alone sees and reveals by its light what is hidden to all males (ergo citizens), and knows the *sēmeia* (i.e., [proximately] the political plans) of the women. Like the lamp, the poet *lampei tous aporrhētous muchous* (12–13). Contrast Plato *Rep.* 388e: Socrates asserts that the guards of Kallipolis should not be fond of laughter, since when one laughs powerfully, one is stimulated, equally powerfully, to seek change (*metabolē*).

¹¹ Unsatisfactory: Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 278–79: "It is not sufficient to say that the *Assembly of Women* is the ugliest comedy; it is *the* ugly comedy," arguing that the ugliness is meant to induce revulsion at democratic egalitarianism. Cf. Whitman, *Aristophanes*, 9; Ehrenberg, *People*, 68; Sommerstein, "Aristophanes," 314; Parker *Aristophanes: Congresswomen*, 2–3; MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens*, 320–21. Rothwell, *Politics and Persuasion*, 23–25 cites other opinions in the same vein.

New Comedy (supposedly apolitical because of its concern with family and private life), with the shadowy (because ill-documented) category of “Middle” Comedy rather uncomfortably wedged in between. *Ecclesiazusae* certainly does manifest some innovations in terms of staging, and these may reasonably enough be seen as generically typical of Middle Comedy. But should *Ecclesiazusae* be regarded as distinct from Aristophanes’ fiercely critical wartime Old Comedies in terms of an embrace of irony or absurdism over serious political content?¹²

Dramatic absurdism implies a thoroughgoing rejection or complete inversion of the rules governing ordinary reality. But I will argue that the humor of *Ecclesiazusae* is not based either on a rejection or on a simple inversion of existing Athenian political and social realities. Rather, the humor of the plot derives from a comic extension (albeit extreme) of the democratic-egalitarian ethos from its ordinary locus in political “citizen society” — the public realm of affairs dealt with exclusively by Athenian citizen-males — into the “whole society” — the social realm occupied by both citizens and noncitizens (especially Athenian women).¹³ The means by which Aristophanes’ characters effect this comic extension of the democratic ethos is the institutional machinery of the democratic state and its associated ideologies.

In what sense might the action of the play be said to mark a retreat from political concerns? There is indeed a less-sustained concentration on the foibles of individual politicians than in some of the earlier works (although several contemporary politicians are savagely lambasted). But the *Ecclesiazusae* is on the face of it both overtly political and very topical. It is necessary to keep in mind the immediate historical context: the play was written in and about the postwar world, a world still struggling to recover from the “twenty-seven-year” Peloponnesian War, the brief, brutal reign of the Thirty Tyrants, and the civil war that had restored full democracy. The Athenian civil war had ended with a decree of amnesty for those who had collaborated with the Thirty, but a good deal of bitterness remained on all sides. Militarily, Athens was on the road to recovery, and, with the help of Persian subsidies, the city was girding for re-

¹² Middle Comedy as a genre: Nesselrath, *Attische*, with additional bibliography cited in Nightingale, *Genres*, 173 n. 4. Changes in staging (e.g., the reduced chorus), Ussher, *Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae*, xxvii–xxviii; Hunter, “Comic Chorus.” For defenses of the play as Old Comedy, see Reckford, *Aristophanes’ Old-and-New Comedy*, 344; Barry, “*Ecclesiazusae*,” 44–76; Rothwell, *Politics and Persuasion*, 24. Contrast David (Aristophanes, 29), who sees the *Ecclesiazusae* (and *Plutus*) as “social [i.e., nonpolitical] comedies *par excellence* . . . [the playwright’s] focus of interest is on politics no longer.” Ehrenberg *People*, 68) considered that the discussion of “communism” marked a transition “from purely political to socio-economic thought,” but also suggested (358–59) that this was the only example of Attic comedy that dealt with a fundamental idea of political philosophy. Antipolitical absurdist: Foley, “Female Intruder,” 16; Huber *Erklärung*, 252–55; Saïd, “*L’Assemblée des femmes*,” esp. 49: “La politique des femmes aboutit à une négation des valeurs proprement politiques.”

¹³ Citizen society versus whole society: Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 161–87. Comic extension of democratic logic in the *Ecclesiazusae*: Saïd, “*L’Assemblée des femmes*,” 35, 51–52; Reckford, *Aristophanes’ Old-and-New Comedy*, 351.

newed hostilities with Sparta. Yet economically and demographically, it would be several decades before the polis had fully recovered.

The restored democracy was based on the same central principles as the fifth-century government, but there had been some noteworthy institutional changes. Pay for attending the Assembly had recently been introduced. And a complicated series of legal reforms, initiated in the last years of the war, had recently been completed. The legal reform codified parts of Athenian law and created a new procedure for the enactment of *nomoi*, which would now be established by boards of *nomothetai*, selected by lot from the ranks of the jurors. The Assembly would continue to pass decrees (*psēphismata*). The exact distinction between *nomoi* and *psēphismata*, and the spheres of competence of boards of *nomothetai* and the Assembly, remain subjects of debate among modern scholars. In the late 390s, these distinctions were undoubtedly a matter of considerable confusion among the Athenian citizen-masses.

The problems *Ecclesiazusae* brings to light may not be as familiar to the modern reader, or as immediately recognizable as “universal” concerns, as are the issues of “war or peace” or “why Cleon (for example) is a corrupt politician and a fool.” But the problems highlighted in the play were the burning issues of the day. They include the hope of regaining a sense of sociopolitical consensus among a citizenry that had been polarized along class lines by the bloody reign of the Thirty, the unusual demographic fact that there were a great many more mature Athenian women than men alive in the 390s as a result of extremely high casualties in the naval campaigns of 410–404, and the confusion arising from a complex series of legal reforms that had recently redefined the relationship between law and legislative Assembly decree.¹⁴

B. PLOT AND STRUCTURE

In the first scene of the play, the characters are Athenian women, who are preceded on stage by Praxagora—the female demagogue. Her opening monologue sets the agenda for the main issues that will be dealt with in the body of the play. We learn from Praxagora that at the Skira (a women’s religious festival held earlier in the year), a number of Athenian women had made a pact among themselves to take over the state. They planned to accomplish this by packing the citizen Assembly with women dressed in their husbands’ clothes. One of their number would propose and the rest would vote for a *psēphisma* that would enfranchise women and disenfranchise men. The women’s secret agreement was sealed by the standard enactment formula of the Athenian Assembly: in referring to the decision they had made at the Skira festival, Praxagora states (18), “It appeared right to my women-friends” (*edoxe tais emais philais*) that they should take over the state. Many members of the audience, as

¹⁴ Athenian desire for *homonoia*: above, 1.B.2; one of the comic slogans of *Ecclesiazusae* is the closely related term *hapaxapas*, “all together” (217, 719, 1148). Demographic imbalance: Strauss, *Athens*, 70–86, 82 n. 3, with Taaffe, *Aristophanes and Women*, 131. Legal reforms: below, 3.C.4.

experienced Assemblymen, would be familiar with the Assembly's standard enactment formula, "It appeared right to the demos" (*edoxe tōi dēmōi*).

Praxagora's comment is an important pointer. The plot hinges on the use of the democratic political process to enact, through felicitous speech performance, a new sociopolitical reality. Moreover, Praxagora's comment immediately alerts the audience that the play will mix together two seemingly incompatible categories: women—who were denied a political role in the polis as a function of their gender—and the political business of the Assembly. Praxagora's substitution of the term "women-friends" in the enactment formula for the expected "demos" also announces a second conflation of ordinarily distinct spheres: the public realm of collective interest and the private realm of friendship (*philia*).¹⁵ Especially because of their concerns about the potential effects of inter-polis aristocratic friendship, the Athenians were normally very eager to keep these two realms as separate as possible. But the Athenians also knew that friendship was in fact deeply imbricated in democratic politics, that this had caused problems in the recent past, and that it could lead to more difficulties in the future. Much of the action of the play will rotate around the problem of whether selfish private interests and public communal interests can be reconciled, and if so, under whose auspices.¹⁶ This issue was, of course, central to Ps.-Xenophon's complaints about democracy and Thucydides' analysis of the breakdown of constitutional democracy in the course of the Peloponnesian War. Nicias and Alcibiades, in Thucydides' presentation of the Sicilian Debate, had each attempted to square his own pursuit of private interests with the public good. Aristophanes' audience must now wonder: What values are implicit in "female-friendship," and how will those values affect individual Athenian citizen-husbands and the civic concerns of the polis as a whole?

The women had organized themselves politically into a sort of probouleutic council at the Skira festival (Praxagora calls the resolutions made there *bou-*

¹⁵ Cf. 528ff.: Praxagora explains her absence from Blepyrus' house as a visit to "a woman . . . comrade and friend" (*gunē . . . hetaira kai philē*) in birth-labor. Like an Athenian man, Praxagora regards it as an ethical duty to help "comrades and friends" in need, yet the woman's assertion of this duty, by authorizing her to leave home at night without seeking the permission of her *kurios*, implies a challenge to male authority.

¹⁶ On the conflation of the spheres of "women" and "the political" and the issue of private interests, see esp. Saïd, "*L'Assemblée des femmes*"; while impressed by Saïd's analysis of the play, I ultimately diverge from her reading, which emphasizes how the private and "female" sphere in the end engulfs and replaces the traditional "male" and political sphere (esp. 45–49), in part because the relatively hierarchical society of the Greek family (with the adult, male *kurios* at its head) seems to me an inappropriate model for the hyperegalitarianism of the new regime. Cf. Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 1–19; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality*, 9: in Athens, the regulation of sexuality and the family was a political issue "inextricably connected to its conception of democracy." *Philia* in Greek culture: Herman, *Ritualised Friendship*; Konstan, *Friendship. Philia* in postwar Athenian politics: Strauss, *Athens*, esp. 21–24. Athenian concerns with the politics of *philia*: Humphreys, *Family*, 22–32. Cf. *Eccl.* 1023–24. Rothwell (*Politics and Persuasion*, 10–19) points out that the selfishness of the demos is the satiric target of the play; Farrar ("Ancient Greek Political Theory," 24–26) notes the prominence of the theme of personal selfishness as a problem in late-fifth-century Athenian literature.

leumata, “resolutions of the council,” 17). Now, in the play’s first scene, they intend to become public political actors by taking over the full governmental apparatus of the state through constitutional means. The plot is driven by the women’s manipulation of the existing constitutional process to achieve their goals: the cross-dressed women intend to propose and pass the decree that will legally constitute women as citizens, while stripping men of their political prerogatives. Although the outcome sought by the women is no doubt outrageous (in the eyes of the original audience), it is not utterly preposterous: the rules of the Assembly imagined in the *Ecclesiazusae* are those of the real Athenian Assembly in the early fourth century. What might, however, appear fantastic to the Athenians are the suppositions that women could organize themselves politically and that they could get away with the cross-dressing deception for long enough to pass the measure. For the play to have real critical bite, the audience must be persuaded that (at least in comic Athens) Athenian women *might* be political and that their deception *might* succeed. Aristophanes consequently addresses in detail the issues of “women as political animals” and the mechanics of making the deception a successful one.

The main action of the opening scene is practicing the speeches whereby the women’s measure will be proposed and defended in the Assembly. Although there are plenty of sly jokes about female fondness for sex and wine, it quickly becomes clear that the women’s motives and goals in seizing the reins of the state are serious, communitarian, and explicitly political. Praxagora’s goal is “to take over the affairs (*ta pragmata*) of the polis” in order “to accomplish something good (*agathon ti praxai*) for the polis” (107–8). Like a typical genuine Assembly speaker, Praxagora announces that her desire for political influence is a concern for the polis’ best interests. She might, therefore, be expected to identify what is wrong with current policies. Notably, however, Aristophanes never explicitly alludes to a particular problem, to a *proximate* cause for the women’s momentous decision to take over the state. The sole item on the agenda of the play’s Assembly meeting is how to assure the security (*sôtēria*, 401, 412) of the polis. Various endemic public evils are alluded to, which the women’s new regime will seek to eliminate (e.g., sycophantism, poverty, debt).¹⁷ Yet no *particular* crisis is ever mentioned. As a leader of women, Praxagora recalls Aristophanes’ other great political heroine, Lysistrata, but Praxagora’s motivation is much more generalized. Lysistrata sought to end a useless war and bring the men home so they could return to fulfilling their usual peacetime roles as husbands and fathers. In order to accomplish that end, Lysistrata proposed using the weapon of sexual relations—an obvious enough comic choice

¹⁷ 560–62, 565–67. Cf. 573–75: the chorus claims that the goal of women is “collective good fortune” (*koinēi . . . eutuchia*; accepting the emendation of Meineke and Schröder, printed by Coulon in the Budé edition) for *politēs* and *dēmos* alike. Praxagora’s good character (*oukoun ponēra*) is confirmed by her husband (350): another indication that her motives are not selfish (unlike those of *ponēroi* politicians). Foley (“Female Intruder,” 14) attempts to define the problems the women’s takeover might be intended to solve, but does not suggest anything very specific. Cf. Barry, “*Ecclesiazusae*,” 45–49.

given that sexuality is an attribute Athenians tended to associate with women (as the rather nervous jokes about women's love of sexual congress in *Ecclesiazusae* confirm).¹⁸ Praxagora's motivation is broader; she intends to make much more fundamental changes in the nature of the relationship between the genders and between existing economic classes within the citizenry. Moreover, she plans to use explicitly public and political means to accomplish this end.

The "world of women" presented in the opening scene is thus preeminently the world of generalized public interest. It is also a world of symbols, as line 6 makes clear. Holding up a lamp, Praxagora calls upon it: "Flash forth, by your light, the agreed-upon symbols" (*horma phlogos sēmeia ta xunkeimena*). This line provides a key to understanding one of the main critical points of the play: the ambiguities inherent in the function of "agreed-upon symbols" in Athenian public life.¹⁹ The play as a whole explores the nature of the public processes by which politically meaningful symbols—and thus (politically created) "social facts"—are established in the democratic polis. In so doing, it also exposes a central sociopolitical contradiction: As Thucydides' history repeatedly points out, the Athenians had great faith in their own ability to employ public symbols in political processes in order to establish and redefine social facts. But they simultaneously recognized the existence of a material and "natural" order standing outside the realm of politics.²⁰ Thucydides sought to show that the competitive environment of democratic institutions led to a tendency to confuse social and natural facts. Much of the humor of Aristophanes' play arises from the playwright's revelation of what might happen if the assumption that facts can be established in the Assembly were to run head on into the belief that some parts of the Athenian social order were natural and immutable. Would the immovable object of a naturalized social order give way before the unstoppable force of public constitution of political meanings? On this central question turns the action, much of the wordplay, and the critical bite of the drama.

The play's second scene jumps to the world of citizen men—the main characters are Praxagora's husband, Blepyros, his neighbor, and his friend Chremes.

¹⁸ Sexuality becomes problematic in *Ecclesiazusae* when the question arises of who should be the sexual aggressor. In *Lysistrata* and in the opening scene of *Ecclesiazusae*, the women are said to enjoy sex, but it is only after they have become "masculine" in the later scenes of *Ecclesiazusae* that they begin to imitate men in aggressively pursuing the objects of their desire and using force to achieve their desires; below, 3.C.3. The concern focuses on issues of family honor and legitimacy: if a man's wife actively enjoyed sexual congress, he might have reason to fear that his wife would dishonor the *oikos* by infidelity and that his heirs might not be his biological sons.

¹⁹ The term *ta xunkeimena* is used by Ps.-Xenophon (2.17) in reference to agreements made in the Assembly, but not "underwritten" by any worthy individual. And thus, in both authors, the term points to sociopolitical constructionism and its problematically arbitrary nature.

²⁰ The lamp itself participates both in the world of symbol (the *sēmeia*) and in the realms of perception and of the material world. Praxagora claims that it is appropriate for the lamp alone to be witness to their plans, because the lamp "sees" them in sexual ecstasy and when they steal wine. Furthermore, the lamp's flame is used to burn off unwanted pubic hair. Thus it is involved with symbolizing, with perception (which is linked with persuasion, below, 3.C.2), and with producing material effects (which in turn produce the "appearance" of gender). On nature/culture and sexuality in Greek literature, see Winkler, *Constraints*.

The world of men is a world of apparently solid referents. The men's concerns are with material things, from houses to human excrement. And the men's world is quite clearly defined by their narrowly private interests; Blepyros and Chremes transparently regard the Assembly primarily as their source of income rather than as the place where collective needs and civic concerns are addressed and adjudicated.²¹ Praxagora has previously stated that those who hold this sort of selfish attitude about the Assembly should be executed (187–88). The men, located at their homes and concerned entirely with private affairs, thus contrast sharply with the women, whom we met in the previous scene on their way to Assembly and who are deeply concerned with the public weal. This “private world of men versus public world of women” dichotomy inverts the Athenians' ordinary assumption that the private realm is the appropriate domain of women, while the public realm is for men only.²² These confusions are compounded because in the first scene, the women are wearing men's clothes; in the second scene Blepyros, unable to find his own clothes (because Praxagora has taken them as her disguise), is wearing his wife's gown. Clearly, then, “ordinary” Athenian gender roles are already being subverted; this subversion becomes more extreme as the play progresses.

In the third scene, men and women come together in verbal confrontation. The audience already knows that the *psēphisma* giving the state over to the women has passed the packed Assembly (455–57). But Praxagora still feels called upon to deploy her rhetorical skills to persuade Blepyros and Chremes that the rule of women really will make things better. Through clever verbal maneuvering, calming their fears, and playing on their desires, she succeeds in convincing the men that the new regime will indeed be in their interests. Here the process of debate, persuasion through rhetoric, and consensual decision—performed by the women's leader in the private realm of the home (or, given Chremes' presence, at least the local neighborhood)—mimics the ordinary procedures of the public Assembly itself.²³

In the fourth scene, we face the issue of how the new regime will be implemented. The women have decreed that in order to eliminate the distinction between rich and poor, property will be communalized (590–594), and the Athenians will now live their lives in common, as “similars” (*hena . . . koinon*

²¹ Men's world defined by private interests: 380–82, 388–93, cf. 547–50, 778–79. Farrar (“Ancient Greek Political Theory,” 20) argues that the citizen's ability to maintain a “double identity,” civic and personal, was the definitive political achievement of democratic Athens.

²² “Public men” who monopolize civic space and “private women” and their place at home in the *oikos* in Athenian ideology (although not in lived reality): Cohen, *Law, Sexuality*, 133–70. The inversion of the norm in *Ecclesiazusae*: Saïd, “*L'Assemblée des femmes*,” esp. 37, with literature cited; Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 9–15.

²³ One way that Praxagora calms male fears is by assuring the men that she (and by implication the other women) is still feminine: cf. her use of the feminine oath she forbade to the Second Woman (532) and her comment that she had to take Blepyros' heavy cloak because she is “thin and weak” (*leptē k'asthenēs*, 539). Moreover, while in the new regime men will become completely leisured, women will still do the traditional domestic chore of weaving, 650–54. Rothwell, *Politics and Persuasion*, focuses upon the processes of persuasion in the play.

pasin bioton . . . homoion). The party walls between private houses will be knocked out so that the town of Athens may be made into a single communal dwelling (*oikēsis*), and all residents can visit with one another as they please (673–74). Moreover, individual marriages and families have been abolished; young Athenians will not have any particular father but will regard all older men as their common fathers (635–43). The women’s goal in these related reforms is to eliminate the motive for narrow-minded concentration on private or class interests—that is to say, to dig out the roots of the selfish attitude typified by the men in the second scene.²⁴ The women evidently feel that the standard Athenian solution to individual self-aggrandizement—balancing social inequality against political equality—is no longer adequate in the postwar environment. They seek a new ground for Athenian *homonoia* in a radical homogenization of material and familial interests. This may have been a novel idea to many in the audience, but it was not an idiosyncratic notion within the fourth-century critical community: the instrumental inadequacy of relatively “thin” political equality of the sort provided by democracy to gaining the desirable end of attaining higher common goods would be a leitmotif of Platonic and Aristotelian political philosophy.²⁵

Chremes, who has been convinced by Praxagora’s rhetoric that he should cooperate with the new order, is lining up his private possessions preparatory to taking them to the newly established public warehouse.²⁶ He is confronted by an anonymous Skeptic—a male Athenian who does not believe that the new order can work in the long run, but who is eager to grasp its short-term benefits (esp. 873–74). The Skeptic unsuccessfully attempts to persuade Chremes by transparently sophistic arguments that it is mad for anyone to give up his private property for the public good. Chremes, unconvinced by the Skeptic, continues in his determination to transport his possessions. The threat to the new public order represented by the counterdiscourse of private interest has failed in this test case, although we are left in the dark as to whether or not the Skeptic succeeds in his selfish attempt to become a “free rider” on the new regime.²⁷

In the penultimate scene, the new regime has been implemented, including an

²⁴ 595–634. Cf. 304–10, 197–98 (the *penētes* want war, the rich farmers long for peace), with Saïd, “*L’Assemblée des femmes*,” 34, 49–57.

²⁵ Cf. Dawson, *Cities of the Gods*, on Greek utopianism. Reckford (*Aristophanes’ Old-and-New Comedy*, 349–50) suggests that *Ecclesiazusae* shows how foolishly lazy are utopian hopes, but this conclusion rests on what seems to me an excessively pessimistic reading of the play, see note 28 below.

²⁶ 730–45: Chremes stages a mock civic procession, with each of his goods taking its place in the parade; this plays on a powerful civic image in that the Panathenaic procession symbolically integrated diverse Athenian social orders into a single community: Connor, “Tribes.”

²⁷ The Skeptic character as a Sophist: Rothwell, *Politics and Persuasion*, 62. Barber, (*Strong Democracy*, 179) describes free riders as “self-interested individuals who do not care to comply with public policies or common decisions in the absence of careful policing and external coercion.” Although Barber suggests these types only exist in a “thin democracy,” this scene suggests that the issue was a live one in classical Athens. Whether Barber would regard Athens as a “strong” democracy is uncertain; see Barber, “Misreading.”

“equal opportunity” provision that democratizes sexual relations along the lines of age and attractiveness. Handsome young men and women are forbidden to have sex with their chosen lovers until they have first satisfied the desires of the old and ugly. The scene revolves around the desperate attempt by two young and attractive lovers to circumvent the new law. The lovers fail; at the end of the scene, the miserable young man is dragged off to bed by ugly and elderly women. Once again, the new regime has (for better or for worse) survived a threat posed by personal interest.

In a final scene, Blepyros prepares to join the great communal banquet that the new order has decreed for all Athenians. He (and the audience) is tantalized by a detailed reading-out of the menu of the feast, but we never see him at the banquet, and the audience is not quite sure whether he (or they) will ever actually get fed. Who “really” gets dinner at the play’s end has become a crux for modern interpreters, who are concerned to decide whether the play encourages an optimistic or a pessimistic response to the women’s new regime, and especially to its hyperegalitarian aspects.²⁸ But I would prefer to see the ambivalence between a banquet that exists only in words and a “real” banquet as a culmination of the comedy’s humorous play with the problematic status of speech acts: Could a felicitous political illocution cause genuine, material plenty to come into existence? To answer that question definitively would be to deflate the drama’s elaborately created tensions between speaking and acting. And Aristophanes was much too clever a playwright (and didactic poet) to allow his audience off that easily.

C. PERSUASION AND ENACTMENT

Among the many issues raised by the play, three—each of which is foreshadowed in the first few lines of the opening scene—are particularly important for assessing how the play “criticizes popular rule.” The first concerns persuasion and the performative function of collective decision-making: Are there any practical limits to the sociopolitical realities that can be enacted by citizens in the Assembly? Next is gender: To what extent are female and male appearance and behavior given and fixed by “nature”; to what extent are they politically constructed “social facts”? Third is the intersection of the hidden, private, individual, and differentiated with the revealed, public, communal, and equalized: Can political equality coexist with the right of each citizen to live just as he wishes?²⁹ The issues of persuasion, gender, and equality are closely intertwined

²⁸ Banquet as a crux: Ussher, *Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae*, xxix–xxx, 237. See, for example, Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes*, 279–80; and Taaffe, *Aristophanes and Women*, 109; Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 2–4 (all highly pessimistic); versus Henderson, *Three Plays*, 151 (guardedly optimistic). Earlier literature on the debate is surveyed by Rothwell, *Politics and Persuasion*, 5–10. Schmitt Pantel (*Cité*, 228–31) discusses the relationship of this comic feast to the tradition of the sacrifice/banquet in democratic Athens, noting the comic feast’s “domestic” aspects.

²⁹ Equality and freedom (as both liberty and license) are taken by Plato and Aristotle as the

in the language and action of the play. Moreover, the playwright manages to show how these three concerns are bound up with problems of law, innovation, and the value of past practice—problems that were particularly poignant in the postwar era.

The play moves quickly to the matter Thucydides had identified as the key problem with decision-making in Athens' direct democracy, that is, to an exploration of the effective limits of the performative speech acts that defined Athenian political life. At one point in the play, Chremes reminds Blepyros of the old Athenian tag: no matter how silly or stupid are the things we decide upon (*bouleusōmetha*), it all comes out well for us in the end (473–75). The recent experience of the Peloponnesian War had given the lie to the strongest formulation of that optimistic notion. As suggested above (1.B.2), all Athenians knew that in the Assembly the demos could create certain political realities (e.g., a state of war) by the simple and sufficient expedient of decreeing that it was the people's will that such realities should exist. And everyone also knew that there were some material realities (e.g., the movement of heavenly bodies) that were beyond the powers of the Assembly to influence. But between these two clear cases there lay a large gray area, and it is by pushing into the heart of this gray area that Aristophanes makes his critical fun. To wit: could a decree of the Assembly make women into participatory citizens—or were the attributes essential for the exercise of citizenship unique to Athenian biological males? Given Athenian sociopolitical values, the humorous potential of the possibility of “women citizens” is considerable, but the humor depends on the poet's ability to call into question the Athenian's intuitive assumption that “maleness” and “femaleness” are natural phenomena. If Aristophanes fails to budge his audience from the conviction that a “political woman” is a natural impossibility, the rest of the play indeed becomes mere absurdity; and absurdism of this sort was, I would argue, not the stuff of Athenian comedy.

C.1. *Nature versus Political Culture*

The subversion of the seamless and inevitable “naturalness” of femininity begins early in the first scene. Rather than simply asking the members of the audience to “willingly suspend their disbelief” regarding the effects of cross-dressing, the play argues that disbelief may be unnecessary. Praxagora asks the forgathered women if those things they had decreed (*edoxen*) at Skira have been carried out (59). The First Woman states that in her own case, that which was agreed upon (*xunkeimenon*) most certainly has been done: she grew out her armpit hair, and oiled herself and stood in the sun so as to get a suntan, when-

defining characteristics of democracy (see below, chapters 4 and 6); on their importance in Athens, see, for example, Hansen, “Ancient Athenian”; Cartledge, “Comparatively Equal.” I do not use the term “right” in a strong sense, since the Athenians seem not to have had a concept of inalienable personal rights: Ostwald, “Shares and Rights”; Schofield, “Sharing in the City”; versus Miller, *Nature*.

ever her husband was away in the *agora* (60–64). The Second Woman chimes in that she, too, threw out her razor in order to get hairy all over “so that I should no longer be similar to a woman” (*gunaiki prosperēs*, 65–67). For anyone in the audience who assumes that “feminine” appearance is a simple fact of nature, these lines must be quite startling. They strongly imply that, far from being an objective reality, the appearance of femininity is an artifact of voluntary human action: when the women allow nature to take its course, when they cease to shave and no longer avoid the sun, they become brown and hairy (like men), and so they no longer resemble what Athenians normally thought of as women.³⁰ The poet seems to be implying that in a true “state of nature,” there would be much less difference between the appearances of men and women than is the case in the society of Athens—which the audience is now led to see as in some sense “artificial.” If women are naturally hairy and brown like men, might they also be naturally political, like men? Having attacked the seemingly unassailable fortress of physical difference, Aristophanes is able to slip in this possibility, and so there remains no necessary impediment to designating women “male” political actors by legislative fiat.

There is obviously a limit to how far the poet can push this sort of argument. And Aristophanes is well aware of that. He does not deny that significant and noticeable biological differences between men and women will remain: Praxagora warns the cross-dressed women that when they are finding their seats in the Assembly, they must avoid clambering over the men when getting their places. She points out that if their clothes became disarranged, what she calls their “Phormisios” might be exposed (93–97). Praxagora is evidently referring here to female genitalia and pubic hair. But it is worth noting that even when calling attention to material biological difference, the poet elides the distinction by alluding to female genitals with the name of a male politician. Of course, the use of Phormisios’ name in this context is also a way to insult the actual politician.³¹

Once the women are in their seats, all will be well: “Who, seeing us, will not take us for men?” Praxagora asks. She then encourages the more timid among

³⁰ The Greek cultural assumption that “women are pale” was deep-seated. Saxonhouse (*Fear of Diversity*, 6) points to Athenian vase-painting conventions, which typically show women as white, men as dark and (when mature) bearded. Xenophon *Oec.* 7.17–40 and [Aristotle] *Oec.* 1.3–4 are examples of assertions by Greek writers that women are “by nature” suited to indoor life, men to outdoor life. But this cultural norm is contradicted by ordinary Athenian practice: Cohen, *Law, Sexuality*, 149–66. And Aristophanes’ play with social constructionism is hardly unique in Greek literature. See, for example, the story reported by Plutarch (*Thes.* 23): in order to effect a military ruse, Theseus disguised young Athenian men as women; they kept out of the sun, took hot baths, and anointed their skin with unguents, as well as arranging their hair and wearing women’s clothing. And, of course, as Taaffe (*Aristophanes and Women*, 130) emphasizes, all women’s parts in Greek dramas were played by “cross-dressed” male actors. On the women’s deception in *Ecclesiazusae* see further Saïd, “*L’Assemblée des femmes*,” 37–40; Taaffe *Aristophanes and Women*, 104–15.

³¹ Cf. Ussher, *Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae*, ad loc.: since Phormisios (according to Aristophanes *Frogs* 965, with scholiast) was supposed to have had a particularly fine beard, this seems to be imprimis a reference to pubic hair; female hairiness is a running joke in the play, e.g., 13, 60–67.

the women with the example of Agyrrhios: formerly *he* was a woman (*gunē*), and now, as you see, “he is an active participant in the greatest of political affairs” (*prattei ta megis’ en tēi polei*, 98–104). When the First Woman asks how women will be able to speak out in public (*demōgorēsei*), Praxagora answers that women will be best (*arista*) at this, since “they say” that among the young men, those who are most often sexually penetrated are the best public speakers (*deinotatoi legein*); since we women are fated to be (*kata tuchēn tina*) much-penetrated, we will naturally be fine speakers too (110–14). Once again, the poet is obviously slipping in standard and generically expected digs at the influential politicians of the day. But by referring to Agyrrhios as a woman, by referring to men old enough to speak in Assembly as sexually passive, and by making sexual penetration a matter of happenstance (*tuchē*) rather than of nature (*phusis*), Aristophanes has upped the critical ante: we realize that the ordinary Athenian definition of masculinity will be called into doubt as well.³²

The women’s practice session is now about to begin, and Praxagora orders each of her companions to put on her false beard and “immediately become a man” (*tacheōs anēr genou*, 120–21). Ergo, by bearding themselves, by completing their appearance of hairiness, women will have “become” men—at least for the moment. But there is still another set of gender-difference pitfalls to be overcome. Praxagora has assured the women that their sexual experiences mean that they are likely to be good speakers, but will they use forms of speech that are appropriate to the male-dominated political arena? The members of the assembled throng are invited by the formulaic “Who wishes to speak?” (*tis agoreuein bouletai*, 128–30). The Second Woman starts her practice harangue on a promising rhetorical note, by employing the familiar topos of the speaker’s inexperience at public address. She claims that she wishes that one of the “accustomed speakers” had said what was necessary so that she herself could have held her peace (151–52). This passage allows Aristophanes to mock the well-worn (and socially important) commonplaces with which real Athenian rhetors introduced their speeches.³³

But after this excellent start, the Second Woman makes the error of punctuating her speech with an oath sworn by the “Two Goddesses” (155); Praxagora quickly jumps in and berates her for using a female oath while “being a man” (*anēr ōn*, 158). Evidently gender is constructed and revealed not only by physical appearance, but by modes of speech.³⁴ But, as in the case of physical appear-

³² Praxagora’s presumably scandalous description of politicians who “are not men,” or “used to be women,” or dress in women’s clothing, is amply paralleled in Aeschines’ speech *Against Timarchus* (345 B.C.) 1.111, 131, 167, 185. Common report (“they say”) was an especially important form of knowledge in the democratic polis; see Dover, “Anecdotes”; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality*, 64–69; Hunter, *Policing*, 96–119.

³³ Importance of topos: Ober, *Mass*; Morris, “Power.” The “accustomed speakers”: Demosthenes 4.1; *Proem*. 55.2; Thrasymachus, F B1a–b (DK), with Yunis, “Thrasymachus B1,” 60–61.

³⁴ The Second Woman fails again by addressing the assembled women as *ō gunaikes* (165). When Praxagora berates her, she says that “seeing myself in front of women, I thought I should speak that way”; Praxagora tells her to sit down, 166–69. The First Woman was unable to differentiate between the referent “women” and the performative “men”; the audience is reminded not to make

ance, the audience learns that a biological woman is not naturally bound to adhere to social conventions governing female modes of discourse. Praxagora's own public speeches (both the practice speech in direct address and her speech to the Assembly as reported by Chremes) are models of sophisticated rhetoric. Praxagora appeals to traditional values, putatively abandoned by Athenian men but maintained by their wives, and she praises women's innate conservatism (214–28). In marked contrast to male politicians and magistrates, women are good managers of funds; they are able to keep secrets; they are honest with one another, requiring no witnesses when they contract loans. They are not sycophants, not litigious, and not traitors to the demos (441–48). She lambasts current practices and politicians, incorporating (and so mocking) many of the “blame” topoi used by real Athenian rhetors and by speakers in Thucydides' text: I have an equal share in this country, she says, just as each of you; the polis is being ruined because of the people's willingness to follow evil (*ponēroi*) leaders; you citizens mistrust those who truly love you, but trust those who care nothing for you; you care too little for the state, too much for your private affairs; and you change public policy too often (173–207). The play's audience later learns that Praxagora had learned to speak well by listening to the orators on the Pnyx, when her family was billeted near there during the war (241–44). Here Praxagora parodies the affectations of the real Athenian orators by denying that she herself had any formal training in rhetoric—yet another common rhetorical topos.³⁵ Praxagora's practice speech is acclaimed by the assembled women, and, when it comes to the event, her strong arguments and speaking skills fool the men in Assembly into voting to pass the *psēphisma* that constitutes citizen women as masters of the state.

The felicitous performance of a speech act in the Assembly has made the women “masculine” in terms of their political rights and responsibilities; but the performance will lack perlocutionary effects if the biological men fail to act in accordance with it. The gap between political enactment and subsequent action, already alluded to by Praxagora in reference to the “Skira resolutions,” is a secondary motif that runs through the play: the Skeptic (who sounds here very much like Thucydides' Cleon) clearly scores points in his debate with Chremes by bringing up cases of *psēphismata* that were never acted upon and by expiating upon the problems caused by this failure to follow through on public decisions (e.g., 797–98, 812–22). Thus, the interim period between enactment and compliance—between performance of a speech act and the public demonstration of its felicity—is fraught with tension. This period of limbo is represented in *Ecclesiazusae* by the first choral interlude and the third scene.

The choral interlude presents the women, still dressed as men, on their way home from the Assembly to replace their husbands' stolen clothes. They are

such a simple-minded error. Taaffe, *Aristophanes and Women*, 115–28, focuses on the role of speech in the construction of masculinity and femininity in the play.

³⁵ The topos “I am inexperienced in public address” (best attested in dicanic rhetoric): Ober, *Mass*, 170–77. This topos plays a role in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*: below, 4.B.1.

concerned that if they are caught out now, the plot will be exposed and the *psēphisma* invalidated. Like Method actresses, they must remain in character. As they had marched along to the Assembly, the members of the chorus had exhorted one another to constantly refer (*aei legein*) to themselves as men (*andres*), so that it wouldn't *exolisthēi hēmas* (285–87). Although Liddell, Scott, and Jones (in the standard Greek-English dictionary) translate *exolisthēi hēmas* in this passage as “slip from our memory,” a more literal translation of *exlisthanō* might be more to the point.³⁶ The women remind them themselves to keep saying *andres* (in my translation) “so that the word does not slip off us.” Read this way, the line is further evidence for Aristophanes' emphasis on how “agreed-upon symbols” can be attached to biological “realities.” But Aristophanes also suggests here the slipperiness of the attachment of the sign *andres* to the referent “biological women.” The symbol (*sēmeion*) “*andres*” will become *xunkeimenon*—agreed upon—only through use, by constant verbal citation and reiteration.³⁷

Once the plotters are safely in hiding, they exhort one another to change back into women (493–503). With the plot securely disguised, the *psēphisma* is safe from challenge.³⁸ The eventual effects of the felicitous performance will be dramatic: women, who have already been shown to be “masculine” in their political interests, will now become more openly assertive. Women are described as “most manly” (*andreiotatai*) in their personal relations with men: Praxagora tells Blepyros that it is none of his business where she went last night (519–21). They will also become publicly aggressive in their sexual appetites and behavior (below, 3.C.3). Meanwhile, men will be feminized in their public demeanor, as well as in their legal position: Blepyros expresses a desire to walk near his wife in public so that all will see him and remark that there goes the wonderful husband of the woman-general (*hē stratēgos*, 725–27). A servant girl (there will still be slaves in the new regime—see below, 3.D) refers to Blepyros by his relationship with Praxagora: “The master . . . the husband of my owner” (1125–26). After *thpsēphisma* has been passed, men are no longer ordinarily referred to as “the citizens” (*hoi politai*) but as “the males of the city” (*hoi astoi*, 458–59, 834).³⁹ Furthermore, a man may no longer act as his

³⁶ Ussher (*Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae*, ad loc.) points out that the construction of *hēmas* after *exolisthēi* is not upheld by Aristophanes *Knights* 491, the closest parallel. But the term is rare, and I think that the translation I offer here is more natural.

³⁷ Cf. Derrida (*Limited Inc.*), who argues that the omnipresent possibility of iteration is why signs can never fix to specific referents. This is an important point for anyone concerned with the ontological status of language, but ordinary Athenians did not share this concern. Within the realm of democratic knowledge, with its pragmatic approach to assigning meaning, iteration is precisely the tool by which signs and referents are conjoined.

³⁸ The women presumably fear a *graphē paranomōn*, the standard legal means by which decrees of the Assembly could be invalidated: Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, 205–12. But since the women intend to close down the lawcourts (turning them into dining halls; see below), this legal remedy will soon be cut off.

³⁹ Although cf. 492: the chorus says that the women's plan “now seems right to the (male) citizens” (*nun edoxe tois politais*). This comment is made in the context of the “interim period” between enactment and confirmation by action and is another joking use of the enactment formula.

own agent (*kurios*) in financial affairs involving more than one *medimnos* of goods (1024–25).⁴⁰ Yet these changes could not have taken place without willing cooperation by men in the new regime, which points to the role of persuasion in the decision-making process.

C.2. Persuasion versus Perception

Aristophanes' treatment of persuasion (*peithō*) in *Ecclesiazusae* can be broken down into persuasion by speech, by perception (especially vision), and by force. Because Athenian political processes were so dependent on persuasion through speech, the potential corrupting power of rhetoric was always in the back of Athenian political consciousness, and it featured prominently in the Thucydidean critique of democracy. The humor implicit in misleading rhetoric and in the schemes of sophistic rhetors was a well Aristophanes had drawn from often before. In this play, as we have seen, he makes fun of the familiar topoi of Athenian political orators in the speeches of the Second Woman and Praxagora. The practice-speech scene is itself humorous in light of the attempts of real Athenian rhetors to depict themselves as spontaneous and reluctant public speakers.⁴¹ The issue of persuasive speech is front and center in scenes two and three, where Praxagora succeeds and the Skeptic fails to influence an audience of Athenian men in their response to the new regime.

Aristophanes poses a question to his huge and largely demotic audience similar to that raised by Thucydides for his elite readers: If public speakers are necessary to democratic government, but their speech is at least potentially misleading, how were the Athenians to distinguish between true and false speech, between good and unscrupulous rhetors? Thucydides had focused on how difficult it was to gain accurate knowledge of brute facts from listening to competitive speech performances. He had suggested (2.A.1) that careful observation—whether by direct visual perception or by secondhand experience, via the historian's objective narrative—might offer decision-makers a more reliable grasp of material realities.⁴² The possibility that potentially false words could be tested and if necessary opposed by accurate perceptions is expounded in scene

At 1132–33, Blepyros is referred to as one of the mob of 30,000 *politai*. Cf. the use of *hai astai* as the standard term for Athenian women: Patterson, “*Hai Attikai*.” *Hoi astoi* for residents of Attica generally: Cohen, “*Astoi*.”

⁴⁰ The new legal provision is cited by the First Hag in response to the Young Lover's suggestion that he might be able to get one of his demesmen or *philoi* to stand surety for him (1023–25)—reinforcing the play's concern with the potential conflict between values of private/local friendship and the law and order of the polis. Compare the offer by Socrates' wealthy *philoi*, who offer to pay a fine in lieu of the death penalty demanded by the prosecution: below, 4.B.1. On Athenian women's legal standing, especially in regard to property, see Schapps, *Economic Rights*; Sealey, *Women and Law*, 12–49; Just, *Women*, 98–104; Todd, *Shape*, 201–31.

⁴¹ Distrust of advance preparation and the speaker's concern to depict himself as spontaneous: Ober, *Mass*, 170–74, 178.

⁴² Chakrabarti (“Introduction”) argues that the importance of testimony for establishing and supporting truth claims has been largely overlooked in the Western (Anglo-American) analytic tradition of epistemology, because of an overemphasis on the importance of perception and inference.

three: Chremes has been convinced by Praxagora's speeches to cooperate with the new regime, and so he is conveying his goods to the public warehouse. The Skeptic has not been convinced by the arguments for the new order, and states that he will not bring out his property until he sees (*idō*) what the majority (*plēthos*) plans to do (770). But what else would they do except to bring out their goods? asks Chremes. "Well, when I see that, I'll be persuaded" (*idōn epeithomēn*, 772), is the reply. Chremes: "But in the streets they say (*legousi*)—". Skeptic: "Sure, so they'll say." Chremes: "And they claim (*phasin*) that they're going to bring their things—". Skeptic: "That's just what they'll claim." The disjunction between testimony (what people say and claim) and perception is at the heart of the impasse; neither man is able to convince the other because Chremes believes what he hears, while the Skeptic demands the evidence of personal perception before he will accept that a new reality has been brought into being by the *psēphisma*.

The perceptual/rhetorical dichotomy is finally shattered when the Skeptic, obviously deeply frustrated at the incapacity of his own sophisticated rhetoric to persuade simple-minded Chremes to act in a risk-free and rationally self-interested (i.e., selfish) manner, asks if, after all the clever self-interest arguments he has deployed against the communalization scheme, Chremes is still eager to convey his goods. Chremes trumps his opponent by replying with the overdetermined comment: "Indeed I am [still eager to convey my goods], and also because I do see (*kai gar . . . horō*) my neighbors bringing out theirs" (805 –6). Here Chremes' own visual perception of what people are doing ultimately confirms the belief that had been inculcated in him by Praxagora's rhetorical persuasion and by what he hears his fellow citizens saying; his perception ultimately helps him to resist the Skeptic's rather paltry attempts at Socratic-style elenctic argumentation.⁴³ The institutional structures of the democracy were predicated on citizens adjusting their behavior to conform to democratic decisions and assumed a great deal of both discussion and mutual emulation among citizens. The scene suggests that these structures render the ordinary citizens (Chremes and his neighbors) deaf to the arguments of those who call upon them to examine their behavior in light of some nondemocratic standard. It thereby challenges critical arguments (such as that of Ps.-Xenophon) predicated on the assumption that all humans, given the chance, will act in selfish self-interest. Democratic deafness to the imperatives of "human nature," the limited purchase of reasoned argument, and the question of whether established laws must always be obeyed, will be problematic issues for subsequent critics of democracy, especially Plato.

In Chremes' case, perception had ultimately confirmed democratic speech. But elsewhere in the play, perception is less straightforward and a less certain guide to appropriate public behavior. The play's action is, of course, predicated

⁴³ Cf. 73–75: Praxagora *sees* (*horō*) that the women had done the various things that they had *said* (*eipomen*) they would do. Pseudo-elenctic seems particularly to the fore at 772–75 and 799–804.

on a false perception: the men in the Assembly were persuaded by the “masculine discourse” of Praxagora’s speech, but they also saw the women, suntanned, hairy, and dressed in their husbands’ clothes, and perceived them as being men. Moreover, the biological men failed to act on the incongruity they did perceive, that is, the relative paleness of the throng of “citizens” around the bema. This surprising paleness is remarked on several times (385–87, 428, 432): evidently the suntanning regimen was not completely successful—the audience is left to decide whether this was due to an inadequacy of practice (not enough time in the sun) or a residual biological distinction (women naturally less likely to tan than men).⁴⁴

Why did the Athenian men fail to act on the basis of their perception of incongruity by challenging the rather odd-looking, pale “men” hanging around the bema? Why were they satisfied by the assumption that it was a “mass of cobblers?” When Praxagora mounted the bema, why did they accept her as a smooth-talking pale young man? Perhaps in part because Athenian political conventions had trained them to distrust the evidence of their own senses, to see clothes when the emperor was walking around naked. Our familiar fairy tale is exactly paralleled in the play: Chremes mentions to Blepyros that during the Assembly’s discussion of how best to assure public security (and before Praxagora made her motion), the politician Euaion came forward to the bema naked, “or so it seemed (*edokei*) to those nearby” (408 –10). We are led to suppose that “those nearby” perceived correctly, but Chremes goes on to say that since Euaion pretended to be wearing a himation, he was allowed by the citizenry to mount the bema and speak his piece.⁴⁵ Apparently, accurate perception was not always an effective counter to the ploys and simulations of experienced rhetors. Once again, the playwright has called the audience’s attention to how the existing political-ideological conditions might allow the women’s charade to work.

C.3. Violence and the Law

The relationship between persuasion and force (*anankē*) is prominent in several passages. At one point in his debate with the Skeptic, Chremes responds that if, as the Skeptic suggests, some other Athenians refuse to bring their goods to the public stores, then “we will do battle with them” (*machoumeth’ autois*). Chremes thus proposes using physical violence against those who refuse to be persuaded either by democratic discourse or by perceiving the good example of

⁴⁴ The “pale throng” is referred to as a mass of “shoemakers,” which certainly points to a recognition that men who work indoors tend to be pale (at least compared to farmers), and perhaps to a concern with the questionable masculinity of “banausic” types who do not tend the land, but must work for others (cf. below, 3.n.66, 6.B.1). On the Greek ideology of farming and its association with warrior virtues and the values of citizenship (especially in nondemocratic poleis), see Hanson, *Other Greeks*.

⁴⁵ Reckford (*Aristophanes’ Old-and-New Comedy*, 346) notes that this scene is an example of the “emperor’s new clothes” motif. Once again, Aeschines’ speech *Against Timarchus* (1.26) offers a striking parallel, in the claim that Timarchus spoke in the Assembly when naked.

the public-spirited actions of their fellows. But the resort to force can quickly lead to difficulties; Chremes is stymied by Skeptic's counter: "What if your opponents are the stronger?" (*kreittous*, 799–803). The dark cloud of potential civil war—and specifically war between the rich (who may want to keep their private property for themselves) and the poor (who are likely to support the communalization regime because they have less to give up and relatively more to gain) hovers behind this brief interchange. The cloud passes quickly, but it would hardly escape the notice of the Athenians, who were only a decade away from the horrors of the reign of the oligarchic Thirty and the civil war that deposed them. The women's property-communalization scheme is presumably intended to eliminate the class tensions that had concerned both Thucydides and Ps.-Xenophon by removing the contradiction between political equality and economic inequality (below, 3.D). But by having Chremes and the Skeptic discuss the use of force against fellow citizens, Aristophanes suggests that a policy of economic equalization could lead to civil war.⁴⁶ The concern with force and with the relationship between strength and justice obviously recalls Thucydides. It also foreshadows some of Plato's central concerns, most notably in the *Gorgias* (below, 4.C).

Elsewhere in the play, force is linked with both persuasion and sexuality. Blepuros is worried that under the new regime, old men like himself may be *forced* to make love to their wives (*anankazōsi pros bian*, 465–67, 471). The troublesome intersection between force, persuasion, and eros—a triangulation Thucydides had explored in the Sicilian Debate (above, 2.E) and one subsequently important to ancient theories of rhetoric—is most fully worked out in the "hags" scene.⁴⁷ The old women have become "masculine" in their sexual behavior: they aggressively pursue the objects of their passion, engage in a perverse *agōn* for their favors, and see nothing wrong in constraining them by force.

The language of the hags scene is replete with the terminology not only of *erōs*, *peithō*, and *anankē*, but also of Athenian law (e.g., *nomos* and *psēphisma*). The Young Man laments that the new system of sexual equality is unendurable for a free man (*eleutheros*, 941). Thus the personal freedom of the citizen, a central value of the democratic order, is invoked in an attempt to challenge the women's new egalitarian order: freedom and equality, normally regarded by the Athenians as complementary democratic values, here come into conflict. But democracy was also predicated on each citizen's willing obedience to the democratically established laws.⁴⁸ The First Hag replies to the Young Man that, de-

⁴⁶ On the prevalence of concern with *stasis* in democratic Athenian culture, see Loraux, "Reflections."

⁴⁷ Rothwell (*Politics and Persuasion*, esp. 45–46) regards the intersection of persuasion and eros as the central theme of the play. On persuasion, force, and eros as the "golden triangle" of ancient rhetorical theory: Kirby, "Great Triangle."

⁴⁸ On the denial of citizen freedom, the inequities of equality, and the tyranny of law in the hags scene, see Saïd, "*L'Assemblée des femmes*," 58–60. For more ordinary Athenian assumptions about the congruity of freedom, equality, and citizen dignity, and the role of the law in ensuring their preservation, see Demosthenes 21, *Against Meidias*, with literature cited below, 4.n.48.

spite your whining, you'll still have sex with me, because "according to the *nomos* it is the just thing (*dikaion*) to do—if we are to rule ourselves democratically" (*dēmokratoumetha*, 944–45). Legally enforced democratic equality has trumped personal liberty, so the young man tries another tactic. He claims that he is not required (*ouk anankē*) to have sex with the old woman (1006) if she has not paid the tax on him; anyway, "I will never be persuaded to obey" (*pithoimēn*, 1011). He is not to get off so easily. The First Hag now brings out the heavy artillery. Claiming that *this* will force you (*anankasei touti se*, 1012), she produces and reads out a *psēphisma* (1013) that begins with yet another pastiche of the familiar enactment formula: "It appeared right to the women . . ." (*edoxe tais gunaixin*, 1015). The young man now knows he is in real trouble (1021), and the First Hag follows up her advantage with a stern injunction that it is necessary to obey (*peisteon*) our *nomoi* (1022).

The First Hag's victory is short-lived, however; the yet-uglier Second Hag arrives on the scene, demanding to know where the Young Man is being taken "in contravention of the *nomos*" (1049–51). He has to have sex with me first, she declares, "as the letters proclaim" (*tōn grammatōn eirēkotōn*). She continues to press her legal case: "It is not just me, but the *nomos* that compels you" (1055–56). In the end of the scene, the sexual violence that Blepyros professed to fear is brought into play: the young man is physically dragged off by the hags. Once again, nature and political culture are starkly opposed: presumably a young man would, by nature, have had adequate physical resources to evade or even to overpower two or three elderly women. But biological physical strength is beside the point. The strength of the laws—of formal, democratically enacted, social conventions—lay behind the old women's demands, and the force of the written letters was irresistible as long as the community as a whole accepted their validity and acted accordingly.⁴⁹

The problem of the relationship between legal authority, political enactment, and the subsequent actions of the citizens is a key issue throughout the play. Early on in the Chremes/Skeptic debate, Chremes professes to see nothing to argue about; he asks, "Isn't it necessary for me to obey (*peitharchein*) the *nomoi*?" (762). "Obey what *nomoi*?" asks the Skeptic. Chremes: "Why, the 'enacted' (*dedogmenoi*) *nomoi* (763). Skeptic: "Enacted *nomoi*—oh, you ignorant man!" (764). "And why," Chremes asks, "am I ignorant? Because I do what is prescribed (*tattomenon*)?" The Skeptic counters with his own question: "Is it necessary for a prudent man (*sōphrōn*) to do what is prescribed?" Chremes replies, "For him most of all," and is again called a fool (765–68). The Skeptic is apparently hinting here that there is something wrong with the concept of "enacted *nomos*." Perhaps a "prudent man" should, instead, obey a natural *nomos* that would be quite different from the politically established laws

⁴⁹ The claim that "it is not I, but the laws that compel you" becomes a rhetorical topos in the fourth century: see Lysias 1.26 (to an adulterer caught in the act: It is not I but the law that kills you); [Demosthenes] 59.115 (it is the laws that will expel Neaira), with Patterson, "Case Against Neaira." Cf. Demosthenes' comments in 21 (*Against Meidias*) on the effective power of communal action in defense of the law: cited below, 4.B.2.

that Chremes and other ordinary Athenian men adhere to. This conception of natural law was common currency in late-fifth- and early-fourth-century Greek intellectual circles, and, as we have seen, it could play a major role in criticism of democracy.⁵⁰ But good-citizen Chremes is not to be seduced by the selfish attractions of natural law. He prefers to stick by a *nomos* that is “enacted” and “prescribed” – *dedogmenos* and *tattomenos*; the connection to Praxagora’s “agreed-upon symbols” is organic and is at the heart of the play’s political concerns.

C.4. *Nomos and psēphisma: Old and New*

Maintaining the connection between public authority, democratic enactment, and established law was enduringly important for Athenian democracy, but there was a special reason for Aristophanes to choose this linkage as the major theme of a comedy to be presented in the late 390s B.C.: The status of Athenian *nomoi* been a hot political issue for the previous twenty years. The problems had begun late in the fifth century, when revolutionary oligarchs, claiming that the democratic government was acting against the dictates of the “ancestral” (*patrios*) *nomos*, seized control of the state. By the time democracy was restored in 410, the Athenians were more conscious of how problematic the concept of *nomos* could be. They decided to have all the *nomoi* collected and republished, a process that took a number of years. After the end of the war, the Athenians realized that the existing *nomoi* did not provide an adequate statutory basis for government, and they initiated a new and complicated constitutional procedure (*nomothesia*) for making laws. *Psēphismata* would still be passed by the demos in the Assembly, as before. But now *nomoi* would be made by specially lotteried committees. Any *psēphisma* that was contrary to an established *nomos* could be challenged and overturned in the people’s courts.⁵¹

What, then, was the difference between the content of a *nomos* and that of a *psēphisma*? Presumably *nomoi* were intended to cover general matters and to address issues of long-term concern, while *psēphismata* were intended to deal with matters of immediate moment (e.g., foreign policy). But the distinction must have been rather vague from the beginning, and it was certainly not always adhered to in practice.⁵² The procedure of *nomothesia* was still very new in the late 390s; many Athenians must still have been rather confused by the whole business. And confusion and vagueness in the public realm provided grist for the comic poet’s mill. In *Ecclesiazusae*, Aristophanes deliberately jumbles the distinction between decrees of the Assembly and *nomoi*. In several

⁵⁰ The contrast between enacted and natural law in *Ecclesiazusae*: Saïd, “L’Assemblée des femmes,” 59–60; Saxonhouse *Fear of Diversity*, 3. The sophistic distinction between “natural law” and customary law is particularly associated with Antiphon’s essay *On Truth*; see Ostwald, “*Nomos and phusis*”; this conception figures importantly in Plato’s *Gorgias*, below, 4.C.3.

⁵¹ Collection of laws and *nomothesia* procedure in early-fourth-century Athens: Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, 161–77 (with earlier literature cited).

⁵² Vagueness of the categories *nomos* and *psēphisma*: Ober, *Mass*, 101–2, 299–304.

passages (cited above), the hags treat the terms *psēphisma* and *nomos* as if they were simple synonyms, and an “enacted” or “decreed” (*dedogmenos*) *nomos* should have been, constitutionally speaking, a contradiction in terms.

The *nomos/psēphisma* issue is related to the central problem of enactment: Was the new regime, called into being by the performative speech act of a *psēphisma* of the Assembly, a contravention of the new Athenian approach to *nomoi*? The women’s regime was certainly a fundamental and general change in the political order and was intended to last indefinitely.⁵³ But on the other hand, the women’s *psēphisma* may not have violated any existing law: It is hard to imagine that there was a law on the books that said, “Only biological males may be citizens,” since few Athenians had ever supposed that anything else could ever be the case.

One way to argue that the new regime was in conformity with the Athenian *nomoi* would be to point out that the essence of *nomos* was “ancient custom.” This is the burden of a long section in Praxagora’s practice speech (214–28) in support of the new regime. By defending the rule of women in terms of the women’s conservative tendency to do things in the old, established ways, Praxagora weaves in a familiar comic theme: the eternal conflict between the old and the new. Although both Aristophanes and the Athenian demos had a tendency to link old with good, as usual the poet comically muddles the issue: the radically new order is underpinned by a claim that its beneficiaries represent the Athenian reservoir of old-fashioned virtues. The First Hag perhaps predictably praises the wisdom of the elderly (895–96), and the chorus mocks the citizen spectators for hating anything that is old (580–82: *misousi . . . ta palaia*). Praxagora, on the other hand, fears that they will not want to innovate and will be content with old practices—yet she also believes that she will be able to teach them (*didaxō*) what is necessary (583–85). Blepyros tells her not to worry; Athenians always want to innovate, and they ignore that which is old-fashioned (586–87).⁵⁴ But is the Skeptic—who claims that it is “ancestral custom” to take,

⁵³ The lawcourts and public offices are to be made into public dining-rooms, the bema of the Assembly into a place to store wine jars. There will be no more orators’ speeches on the bema, but there will be recitations by children, who will proclaim who among the soldiers was brave in battle and who was not; the latter will be ashamed and so will not come to the public dinners (676–80). This last passage is particularly interesting, since it suggests that the women’s regime will not require public rhetoric, but will still base itself on public knowledge of individual character; cf. the “best possible” regime of Aristotle (*Politics* book 7, below 6.E). Note, too, that the women’s regime expects to engage in warfare.

⁵⁴ *Nomos* as ordinary or ancient custom: Ostwald, *Nomos and Beginnings*, 33–40, noting that the authority of *nomoi* was attacked by intellectuals, but generally accepted by ordinary people. The context for Praxagora’s defense of female conservatism is the debate in late-fifth- and fourth-century Athens about the “ancient customs” of Athenian ancestors; see below, 5.C. It was generally agreed by all those engaged in the *patrios politeia* debate that it was right to conform to the ways of the ancestors. The questions remained—Which ancestors, and what were their customs? Some political critics argued for a predemocratic past; democrats ultimately responded by making Solon and even Theseus into democrats. See Mossé, “Comment s’élabore”; Plut. *Thes.* 24. On old versus new in the play, see also 304–10, 778–79, 895–96, with Saïd, “L’Assemblée des femmes,” 35; Reckford, *Aristophanes’ Old-and-New Comedy*, 345–47; Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity*, 7–8.

not to give to the common good (778–79) ~~being~~ upright and old-fashioned because he resists the madness of the new regime and because he sees the illegality of a *nomos* being “enacted” in the Assembly? Or is he newfangled and a danger to the democracy because, as a proponent of “natural order,” he refuses to conform to the democratically established laws?

The Skeptic character is easily read as the paradigm of the overclever, quasi-oligarchical, and thus evil Sophist—the sort of man Socrates’ accusers attempted to portray in the trial of 399 B.C. Chremes might just as easily be read as the obedient, democratic, and thus good citizen who stands on the side of the attractively portrayed character of Praxagora. The audience’s sympathies would certainly seem to be with Chremes in his debate with the Skeptic. But “Sophists are all bad, simple citizens are all good” seems too banal for a genre as sophisticated in its critical stance as comedy, and Aristophanes does not allow his audience to take away such a simple lesson. Chremes started out (in scene two) a selfish citizen who regarded democratic institutions only as a source of private income. He was converted into an enthusiastic supporter of the newly inaugurated regime (in scene three) by Praxagora’s rhetoric; and his new faith was confirmed (in scene four) by his perceptions of what the majority of his fellow citizens were doing. Chremes’ (and his fellow Athenian men’s) belief in and conformity to the recently “agreed-upon symbols” ~~the~~ realities that had been created in the Assembly ~~are~~ what has allowed the “natural” social order to be upset.

It is because Chremes and his fellow biological men accepted as authoritative the public speech act that established women as politically male, that the intuitively correct (for the fourth-century Athenian male audience) “natural” or ~~der-in~~ which women are privately oriented beings whose sexuality is kept carefully hidden, and men are politically involved, sexual aggressors ~~has~~ been overturned. If, in the ordinary world of democratic Athens, a decree of the Assembly is “the conventional effect of a conventional procedure,” Aristophanes shows us that *unconventional* effects are also possible outcomes of conventional procedures. The citizens in the audience of the play learn that they really cannot have it both ways. When deeply cherished assumptions about nature collide with democratic political culture, something has got to give, and it is up to the male citizens to decide whether they will acknowledge limits on their political power to enact social realities, or admit that their social order, and the political order that was built upon it, was not as natural as they sometimes liked to pretend.

D. EQUALITY AND EXCLUSIVITY

Along with the issues of enactment/persuasion, nature/custom, and public/private, egalitarianism and its limits are an important theme throughout the play. And exploring the limits of egalitarianism in Aristophanes’ drama allows a reconsideration of the issue of whether *Ecclesiazusae* is genuine political com-

edy or an absurdist fantasy. In the real world of early-fourth-century Athens, Athenian (male) citizens were political equals, and they used their functional political equality to mediate social inequalities both legally (through the limited economic-distribution function of legal penalties and taxes imposed on the rich) and ideologically.⁵⁵ But what were the practical limits of using political power to redress social inequality? The most glaring inequalities within Athenian political society were the result of the unequal distribution of wealth. So what if the poorer majority of citizens were to use their legislative power in order to enforce economic equality? This had certainly occurred to wealthy Athenians, and they considered it a dreadful possibility. Indeed, despite the oaths taken by jurors and Athenian magistrates to the effect that they would not tamper with private property, there was no necessary reason for anyone to suppose that a property-equalizing decree could not be passed in the Assembly.⁵⁶ The Athenians certainly recognized a *de facto* private sphere outside state authority. But the Athenian citizenry recognized no fixed limits to its communal power to interfere legally in the private affairs of each citizen, as Aristophanes reminds his audience at several points.⁵⁷

In light of these tensions, it is hardly surprising to find Aristophanes creating a dramatic situation that explores the possible effects of a decree that called for property communalization. Part of the value of the scheme, he suggests, is that by eliminating the motive for selfishness, it will reintegrate the public and the private realms.⁵⁸ But Aristophanes also implies in the *Skeptic* scene that clever and selfish citizens would attempt to take as much as they could get from the

⁵⁵ This is the burden of Ober, *Mass*, esp. 192–247.

⁵⁶ Wealthy Athenians fear property distribution: Jones, *Athenian Democracy*, 54–61; class tensions and their effect on policy: *Eccl.* 197–98, 411–26. Oath of the dicasts and archons to leave property in the hands of its owners: Demosthenes 24.149; [Aristotle] *Ath. pol.* 56.2.

⁵⁷ *De facto* recognition of limits: Hansen, “Ancient Athenian;” Wallace, “Law, Freedom.” No necessary limits in the play: 377–78, 412–25, 465–75. On the power of the *demos* to legislate concerning private action, Finley, “Freedom of the Citizen,” remains essential. Public and private in Athens: Humphreys, *Family*, 1–32, 61–74; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality*, 218–40, and *Law, Violence*; Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 178–87. Foley (“Female Intruder”) reads the play as an example of the invasion of the public (male, political) sphere by the private (female, domestic) sphere. This reveals an important level of the play’s meaning, but Foley seems to go too far in arguing that it was due to the *failure* of the political sphere in the late fifth and fourth centuries that Athenian poets and philosophers “began to look at other social models for correction, including . . . the household” (19). Saïd (“*L’Assemblée des femmes*”) offers a similar reading.

⁵⁸ Cf. Saïd (“*L’Assemblée des femmes*,” 50–58), who reads the effect of communalization as the complete absorption of the public realm by a sort of *super-oikos*; but see above, 3.n.16. The sexual-equalization scheme also involves equalization of access to material benefits, 611–34. And the common-fathers scheme (635–43) is intended to create public order by communalizing ordinarily private interests: Aristophanes comically assumes that a son has a right to hit his *own* father (for other Aristophanic father-beaters, see Strauss, *Fathers and Sons*, 158–59, 163–65)—but will attack anyone *else* who strikes his father, because that would compromise family honor. Under the new regime, since all older Athenians are “fathers” of all younger Athenians, the latter will defend the former collectively. “Private” honor has become “public” order. Again, this extends the logic of the democratic system, wherein private assaults and insults were mediated by the people’s courts; see Herman, “Tribal and Civic Codes,” “How Violent,” and “Honour, Revenge.”

new economic order, and give back as little as they could get away with. Here (as in the Blepyros/Chremes scene) Aristophanes (like Thucydides) confronts his audience with the limits of Athenian public-spiritedness, and also with the insidious potential of personal greed and self-interest to undercut political solutions to social ills. With the elimination by legal fiat of the elite of wealth, he hints, the Athenians might be victimized by a new (and maybe worse) elite of the clever and unscrupulous. Those good citizens who cooperate unselfishly with the new economic order could end up losers if the clever manage to pervert the system to their own ends, and surely this would increase the tensions that property redistribution might be expected to ameliorate.⁵⁹

The equalization of sexual opportunity is closely related, but goes a comic step further in suggesting political solutions to social problems and the potential power of the democratic public realm to override personal choices in private life. The real Athenian state was not completely neutral on the subject of who slept with whom and under what conditions. Not only was adultery treated harshly under Athenian law, but a citizen who engaged in inappropriate sexual behavior (i.e., behavior open to the interpretation that sexual favors were being exchanged for goods) could be penalized by partial loss of the ordinary privileges of citizenship (*atimia*). The situation in which a lover's choice of with whom he will sleep was subject to state regulation was not really so far-fetched in the context of Athenian political society, where egalitarian principles led citizens to look upon elections as potentially oligarchic and where the lottery assured that all citizens had an equal chance at such privileges and prerogatives that public service might offer.⁶⁰

If we extrapolate from the political realm to the social, why should the young and attractive have easier access to the privileges of sexual pleasure? And why should the aged—who were publicly acknowledged as the only legitimate politically privileged demographic subgroup of the citizen body⁶¹—not be given privileges in the sexual realm? Furthermore, Aristophanes uses the device as yet another way of showing the power of political enactment. Even if democratic political processes were unable to eliminate the *reality* of biological difference (in this case, age and beauty), they could alter the *meaning* of difference by equalizing the functional advantages (access to sexual pleasure and material rewards) associated with difference.⁶² Praxagora's comment that the scheme is completely democratic (*dēmotikē g' hē gnōmē*, 631) is funny, but not crazy in an Athenian context. In short, the proposals for communalization of

⁵⁹ 730–876, cf. 204–5. The character of the Skeptic is of key importance to the “ironic” reading of the play. See Sommerstein, “Aristophanes,” 316, 319–20, 330–31; David, *Aristophanes*, 14, cf. 7, 32, 36.

⁶⁰ Legal regulation of sexual conduct: Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 88–112; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality*. Elections potentially oligarchic: Aristotle *Pol.* 1294b7–10.

⁶¹ Political privileges of older Athenian citizens: Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, 88–90. Aristotle (*Pol.* 1275a12–18), by contrast, supposed that the elderly might legitimately be (and in some poleis were) denied certain privileges; see Ostwald, “Shares and Rights,” 52.

⁶² This is a corollary of the concept defended (against Roland Barthes) by Petrey, *Realism and Revolution*, 62: “Difference is an illocutionary performance not a perlocutionary principle.”

property and equalized sexual relations stretched the existing reality, without inverting it. Much of the deeper humor of the play relies upon showing the potential grotesqueness (given Athenian values and mores) of extending the reach of something that was familiar, and almost universally accepted—political equality and its social ramifications.

But the play operates on another level as well. The extension of political power to women challenged a basic tenet of the political society. Exclusivity was a principle almost as central to the existing Athenian political order as equality. The rectitude of limiting access to the citizen body had been reaffirmed in 403 by the refusal to give block grants of citizenship to those metics and slaves who had aided the democratic resistance to the Thirty and by the reenactment of the double-descent rule of 451 B.C.⁶³ By introducing the conceit of Assemblywomen, Aristophanes confronts the audience not only with the consequences of extending to its logical extreme the concept of egalitarianism within the political society, but with the concerns and desires of those who were stranded outside that society. The women allude to no *specific* crisis they intend to solve, because they are attacking the logic of the male-only political order itself, not merely some symptom of that order (e.g., an unnecessary war). Consequently, the *Ecclesiazusae* may be read as a potentially more politically subversive play than *Lysistrata*—even if the extent to which the potential subversiveness of the play is realized remains difficult to judge given the ambivalence of certain key scenes.

It is important to note that the playwright's twisting of reality occurs within carefully established limits. In the real world, Athenian women were in some ways closer to citizen status than were metics, and they were certainly closer to citizenship than were slaves.⁶⁴ Women were obviously biologically essential in the establishment of the condition of citizenship for all male citizens, but they also participated actively in the education of the future citizen. This was acknowledged in Athenian law. Since the son of a male citizen and a foreign woman could not ordinarily be regarded as citizen, Athenian women must have imparted something to their offspring that made the latter worthy of political

⁶³ Decree of Thrasybulus to grant citizenship to metics and slaves who had aided in the revolt successfully indicted by a *graphē paranomōn*: *Ath. pol.* 40.2. Whitehead ("Thousand") argues that the fragments of *IG II²* 10 should be restored in such a way as to show that ca. 1,000 metics who had helped in deposing the Thirty were in fact given full citizenship in 401. But cf. the alternative reconstructions of Krentz ("Foreigners") and Harding ("Metics, Foreigners, or Slaves"). On legislation to keep the citizen rolls "clean" in the fourth century, see Osborne, *Naturalization*, 4: 152, 155–64; Whitehead, *Demes*, 106–9. Cf. the comments of Isaios 6.47, 8.43; Dem. 57.30–32. Ideological importance of Athenian exclusivity: Cartledge, *Greeks*; Roberts, "Athenian Equality"; Dougherty, "Democratic Contradictions." The Athenian reliance on exclusivity can, however, be overstated; see Cohen, "*Astoi*," for a counterargument.

⁶⁴ The hierarchy citizen-male, citizen-wife, slave, is recapitulated by Aristotle's psychological theory in the *Politics*, which treats the "natural" slave as *more* severely psychologically hampered (in respect to the capacity to engage in meaningful deliberation, and thus in politics) than are the wives of psychologically "complete" adult male citizens; see below, 6.B.1.

rule. Notably, Praxagora brings up women's close and continuing ties to their sons as an argument in support of the new order (233–34, cf. 635–49).⁶⁵

The playwright's concern with establishing limitations on the degree of dramatic unreality is exemplified by the unchanged or even lowered status of slaves under the women's new regime. Slaves (both male and female) will remain an important part of society; indeed, slaves will now do *all* the productive agricultural work, and Athenian males will live at leisure by extracting the surplus value of slave labor (461–64, 651–52). Consequently, although the bounds of exclusivity have been breached on the front of gender, they are strengthened on the front of occupational status. Male Athenians will no longer have to engage in what elite Athenians (at least) regarded as “slavelike” wage-labor, and so Athenians will become more clearly a status elite in relation to the unfree population.⁶⁶ The play therefore acknowledges and addresses the concerns raised by Ps.-Xenophon about the lack of a clear line of demarcation between Athenian slaves and their masters. Furthermore, in the new regime, slave prostitutes will be forbidden to consort sexually with citizen males, who will be required to save their sexual energies for relations with Athenian citizen women (718–24). Once again, the play suggests a way of reinforcing exclusivity bounds; now sexual relations, egalitarian within the citizen body, will be illegal outside of it.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Although women were in some ways further from citizen status than slaves and metics because the latter could, in extraordinary circumstances, be made citizens, whereas a woman never could. The original citizenship legislation of 451/0 forbidding the offspring of an Athenian and a foreigner to be a citizen: Plutarch *Per.* 37.2–5, with Hignett, *History of the Athenian Constitution*, 343–47; Patterson, *Pericles' Citizenship Law*; Boegehold, “Perikles' Citizenship Law”; Cohen, “*Astoi*.” The importance for the reform in defining the Athenians' image of themselves: Loraux, *Invention*, 150. Cf. the rhetorical ploy of attacking the ancestry of an opponent's mother: Ober, *Mass*, 268–69.

⁶⁶ The provision that all productive labor will be done by slaves anticipates the arrangements of the “best possible” state of Aristotle *Pol.* book 7: below, 6.E. For the link between manual labor (and commerce), the corruption of the soul, and slavishness, especially in philosophical thought, see Xenophon *Oec.* 4.2–3, 6.4–9; Plato *Rep.* 495d–e, 590c; *Laws* 7.846d–e, 11.919d–920a. Aristotle *Pol.* 1328b19–1329a2, 1337b18–22, 1341b8–18; *EN* 1131a24–29; and the discussions of Ober, “Aristotle's Political Sociology,” and below, 6.B.1. Cf. Aymard, “*Hérarchie*”; Mosse, *Fin de la démocratie*, 160–66; Markle, “Jury Pay,” 284; Loraux, *Invention*, 182 with n. 412; Vlastos, “Historical Socrates,” 99–100; Balme, “Attitudes to Work”; Wood, *Peasant-Citizen*, 137–45 and “Demos.” There has been considerable debate as to how far down the social ladder scorn for labor extended. Raaflaub (“Democracy, Oligarchy,” esp. 531; *Entdeckung der Freiheit*, 304–11) suggests a hypothetical origin for the scorn for labor in elite attempts to respond to the democratic monopolization of the concept of freedom and notes that the “average” Athenian may not have fully shared this view. Yet Raaflaub (“Equalities and Inequalities,” 154–59) also argues that the standing of Athenian laborers remained “precarious” and that they were subject to various disabilities. Contrast Wood, *Peasant-Citizen*, esp. 139; Strauss, “Athenian Trireme”; Ober, “Revolution Matters.”

⁶⁷ Said (“*L'Assemblée des femmes*,” 57) suggests that sex is now a “good” to be reserved (like public payments) for citizens. Cf. Ehrenberg (*People*, 152–53), who notes that although metic *hetairai* are not specifically mentioned here, they seem to be included in the *pornai* and *doulai kosmoumenai*; and Halperin (*One Hundred Years*, 99–101), who argues (in part on the basis of very late sources) that sexual availability of noncitizen female prostitutes was an important aspect of the self-definition of even the poorest Athenian citizen males.

The world of the *Ecclesiazusae* operates according to the standard egalitarian and exclusivist tenets of Athenian political culture, even as it challenges both the potential consequences and the current application of those tenets. Therefore, the Athens of Aristophanes' play is not merely a topsy-turvy never-never land, but a pointed and challenging critical allegory that confronts the members of the audience with the peculiar nature of the political order in which citizen males were theoretically equal and omnipotent political actors. It confronts them with the usually hidden contradictions inherent in the conditions of social inequality that pertain within the citizen body and with the hypocrisy involved in acknowledging that women are partners in creating citizens (and other material and social realities), while denying that they should or could participate in political decision-making.

In the *Ecclesiazusae*, as in his other political comedies, Aristophanes presents his audience with serious problems facing the citizenry and the whole society, but in this play, at least, he implies that any solution to those problems will be sought on the political and public plane.⁶⁸ The means used by the women to revolutionize the sociopolitical order are public speech and political process. The women only need wear male clothing to one meeting of the Assembly, and then can shed it afterward (496–99, 506–9). The plot does not depend on *continued* deception, because the new regime was legally instituted—its enactment was efficaciously performed.⁶⁹ And here, at the level of the effects of political decisions by the citizen masses—whether it is male citizens or their wives in their stead—the play reaffirms the unique power of political action in a democratic state. Democratic politics really had changed, in revolutionary ways, the nature of social relations between elite and ordinary citizens. Democracy also held the capacity to change the nature of relations between citizens and noncitizens. Political power was potentially dangerous, open to abuse, and perhaps even limited in its efficacy if it were stretched too far, but the play locates it in the center of the organizing structures of Athenian society.

Finally: Was Aristophanes' comic criticism of Athenian government in the *Ecclesiazusae* meant to undermine democracy? Surely not. But nor was it meant to provide actual solutions to particular problems. It was the comic playwright's job, as a "professional" internal critic, to make comic fun out of Athenian institutions, ideology, and social practices. Being confronted with the comic criticism might lead a citizen to think differently, maybe prod him to speak out or vote for measures in the Assembly. But it was certainly not the comedian's job to sort out social and political problems and package them as a simple lesson that his audience could learn by heart. *Ecclesiazusae* is emphatically political comedy in that it derives a good deal of its humor from the foibles of democracy—from democracy's deep-seated institutional and ideological structures and from confusions arising from recent constitutional tinkering

⁶⁸ Contrast Dikaipolis in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, and his "private" solution to the problem of war.

⁶⁹ The tension in the play between what is revealed and what is concealed, between light and shadow (e.g., 6ff., 288, 314, 595–610), deserves closer attention than is possible here.

with the enactment of law. That humor was meant to cut close to the bone. But it was hardly meant as a mortal blow; there is no need to read Aristophanes as either an embittered antidemocrat who sought to undermine the power of the *demos* or a strong partisan of democracy as it was currently practiced. The play's conclusion remains intentionally ambiguous on the issue of whether the new egalitarian sociopolitical order will be good or bad for the polis; the fact that the play does not end in utter disaster might even be read as a guarded vote of confidence.

In the *Ecclesiazusae*, Aristophanes reveals that Emperor Demos often strides about the *agora* and the Pnyx with no clothes on, and the poet continually points out that in Athens, because of the enactment procedures of the democracy, signifiers tend to slip off their "natural" referents. Moreover, by redefining Athenian women as possessors of a political consciousness (and thus as potential citizens), he challenges the notion, familiar from Ps.-Xenophon, that Athens was in no danger from "the disenfranchised" in light of the inclusivity of democratic citizenship. These are very serious issues, despite their presentation in comic garb. Indeed, they are arguably *so* serious that they could be made public *only* through drama. Perhaps the comic playwright's most important critical role was to make ideological assumptions visible and thus to bring ideology back into the realm of social agreements and out of the realm of the unchangeable natural order of things. Aristophanes' revelations are subversive in that they expose the ideological underpinnings of democratic knowledge, but this subversion was not read by the original audience as destructive. He amused and perhaps educated, but did not seek to overthrow the *demos*.

The distinction between subversion and destruction is quite clear in the portrayal of the play's protagonist. Praxagora is, as I suggested above, a sympathetic character; her self-proclaimed moral standing is confirmed by her husband's testimony that she is "not a wrong-doer" (*ponēra*, 350). Like many Athenian citizens, Praxagora hates sycophants and other leeches on the public order. Her goal, like that of Thucydides' Pericles and unlike that of rascally (*ponēroi*) politicians, is general public improvement: common good fortune for the individual citizen and the Athenian *demos* alike (573–76). When enacted, the women's new regime actually shares much in common with traditional Athenian society: Athens will still fight wars and praise war heroes (676–80). Women will still perform domestic chores (651–54), and the distinction between slave and free will be maintained—indeed, strengthened. While extending the democratic ethos of equality within the realm of the citizenry to include property and sexual pleasure, the social order will remain highly exclusive and hierarchical in distinguishing between those who are "members of the polis" (*politai* or *astoi*) and those who are not. In short, the society of *Ecclesiazusae*, while certainly bizarre by Athenian standards, is far from being utterly absurd; its logic is the egalitarian logic of the democratic polis taken to extremes, not set on its head. The polis that was regarded by outsiders as remarkable for its extension of full political powers to propertyless men, could certainly conceive of (even if not approve of) using political process to equalize citizens' access to

material goods and to the pleasures of sexual congress—and might even contemplate an overtly political role for citizen women.

In *Ecclesiazusae*, Aristophanes invites members of the audience to confront their own contradictory norms and values, but he does not suggest that their democratic system is unworkable. On the contrary, he reminds them what a tremendously powerful and efficient system for performing social realities *dēmokratia* really is. The women's regime (like Thucydides' text) seeks to correct a tendency to selfish manipulation of the system by greedy politicians and short-sighted individual citizens. But (unlike Thucydides' text) the women's new order is predicated on the assumption that at their core, Athenian democratic values are good ones. Aristophanes allows (while hardly insisting upon) the presumption that the Athenian social and political system might be flexible enough to survive the extension of political equality to women and economic equality to the Athenian poor. Although he points out many of the difficulties that this extension would entail, and he is not proposing it as a practical measure, neither does the poet set out to demonstrate that a more generalized equality is an impossible or even an inherently absurd goal.⁷⁰

Because Aristophanes functioned as an internal critic of Athenian popular rule, his revelations were not intended or expected to undermine democratic knowledge. But comic poets did not work in isolation; they surely loaned ideas to and borrowed them from other critics, including those who did seek to challenge the validity of the social facts established in the Assembly and lawcourts of Athens. Perhaps the most famous scholarly crux associated with *Ecclesiazusae* is its relationship to Plato's *Republic*. Like Aristophanes, Plato discusses the advantages of a regime that would feature communal ownership of property, make "citizen women" the equals of men, and eliminate the nuclear family (below, 4.D.3). Was the *Ecclesiazusae* simply a parody of the *Republic*? This suggestion has tended to founder on two interpretive shoals: First, by any feasible dating scheme, Plato's dialogue, as we have it, is several years later than the play. And second, why would a mass Athenian audience find a parody of a specific philosophical text funny? It was one thing for a comedian to poke fun at a philosophical public figure like Socrates, quite another to expect to get laughs out of parodying a (putative) privately circulated advance draft of an abstruse work of moral and political philosophy.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Aristophanes' failure openly to advocate radical changes in the existing social order, the "immanence" of his criticism, leaves him open to the charge by modern readers of being a force of "normalization." Cartledge (*Aristophanes*, 40–42) suggests that Aristophanes "battles on the side of conservative masculinism rather in the interest of constructive social criticism" (42); cf. T. aaffe, *Aristophanes and Women*, esp. 131–33.

⁷¹ The theory that Aristophanes was parodying an early version of Plato's *Republic*, suggested by, inter alios, Norwood (*Greek Comedy*), is now generally discounted; see Ussher, *Aristophanes: Ecclesiazusae*, xv–xx; Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, 200–201; Saïd, "L'Assemblée des femmes," 61; Rothwell, *Politics and Persuasion*, 9–10; David, *Aristophanes*, 20–23, who (I would say, rightly) also disapproves of the alternative view (which, as Reckford [*Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy*, 347–48] and Foley ["Female Intruder," 15 n. 33] point out, is the current communis opinio) that Plato and Aristophanes shared some single common literary source that advocated a communalized

It is by locating both Plato and Aristophanes within the context of the Athenian critical community—rather than assuming a direct intertextual relationship by positing a single common written source or a proto-edition of Plato’s *Republic*—that we can best explain the oft-observed parallels between Aristophanes’ play and Plato’s great dialogue. As noted above, Aristophanes raises a number of issues treated by Thucydides, Ps.-Xenophon, and other Platonic dialogues—as well as those raised by the *Republic*. Any doubt about whether Aristophanes belongs in “the company of Athenian critics” should be put to rest by his prominent literary presence in Plato’s *Symposium*. The key distinction between Aristophanes’ comedies and other critical voices of late-fifth- and fourth-century Athens is, once again, between the immanent critic who seeks amelioration of the existing society and the rejectionist “epic” critic who advocates fundamental changes in existing values and institutions. Whereas Aristophanes, in the role of internal critic, made serious fun by reminding the Athenians of the socially constructed nature of their polity, Plato, in the role of politically disenchanted philosopher, sought to go much further by developing a vision of a moral political order founded on absolute Truth, a vision that would depict democratic Athens as profoundly unjust and ultimately irredeemable.

society. Nightingale (*Genres*, 172–92) discusses Plato’s treatment of comedy, suggesting that Plato took comedy very seriously, and (177–78) inverts Norwood by suggesting that Plato in the *Republic* defended the ideas parodied in Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae*.

Justice, Knowledge, Power: *Plato Apology, Crito, Gorgias, Republic*

A. PLATO AND SOCRATES IN ATHENS

In contrast to our near-total ignorance about the lives of Ps.-Xenophon, Thucydides, and Aristophanes, there is a relatively extensive and reliable ancient tradition about the circumstances of Plato's life. Various details of the tradition may be wrong, but we can say for certain that Plato was born into an aristocratic Athenian family in 428/7 B.C. and that among his relatives were notorious oligarchic activists (Charmides and Critias of the Thirty). Plato was an avid admirer of Socrates and traveled to Sicily, where he attempted to establish a just political regime. He founded an influential school of philosophy at the gymnasium known as the Academy, just outside the city walls of Athens, and died in 347/6 B.C. of natural causes.¹ Given the extensive biographical tradition, it is not surprising that modern readers have often attempted to place the historical Plato at some particular point on the "antagonism to democracy" spectrum.

A.1. Modern Contextualist Readings

Two refugees from Nazi totalitarianism, Karl Popper and Leo Strauss, each argued that Plato wrote from the standpoint of an intellectually committed opponent of the democracy of his own age, and indeed, of all conceivable democracies. Popper found in Plato the earliest, and perhaps most dangerous (because most idealized and seductive), "enemy of the open society" – a "historicist" believer in fixed truths and a reactionary advocate of totalitarianism who, faced with a crumbling society, sought to drag his fellow citizens back into the fixed certainties of a primitive tribalism in order to save them from the troubling complexities of freedom, choice, and social change.² Strauss, on the other hand, saw Plato (along with other ancient authors) as writing in defense of an objective standard of "natural right" and in reaction to the intrusive and

¹ Plato's biography: Diogenes Laertius 3; cf. Field, *Plato and His Contemporaries*; Kahn, *Plato*, 48–59. On the autobiographical *Seventh Letter*, see below, 4.A.2.

² Popper, *Spell of Plato*. By contrast, Popper saw the historical Socrates as a friend of democracy and a champion of the open society (although a critic of democratic institutions): 189–96. For a more balanced take on Plato and democratic values, see Crossman, *Plato Today*. Maurer, *Platons "Staat,"* surveys modern discussions of the topic, focusing especially on the issue of the practicality of Platonic utopianism and the relationship between Platonic and Aristotelian political/ethical thought.

irrational tendencies of democratic relativism, egalitarianism, and “immorality.” If Popper’s Plato hoped to actualize an oppressive hierarchy, Strauss’s Plato believed that, given the practical impossibility of bringing the utopian city of the *Republic* into being, democratic toleration of diversity provided the best and safest environment for philosophers. But Strauss’s Plato was also convinced that democracy was inferior to other regimes in its capacity to create excellent citizens and that he himself (like Socrates and along with all other “true” philosophers) was a potential victim of the mass irrationality supposedly characteristic of democratic regimes. According to Strauss, Plato constructed his texts as intricate puzzles, whose clever encoding would protect them against the prying eyes of the many. The decipherment of these puzzle-texts through close reading “between the lines” would teach “true” philosophers how to control democratic regimes through well-trained, rhetorically skilled minions (the model is Thrasymachus), and so they could hope to avoid the deadly consequences that necessarily ensued when the undisciplined mob became aware of the sorts of things that philosophers really thought about in their ample free time.³

While each of these approaches has enjoyed considerable popularity in certain circles, neither Popper’s nor Strauss’ view is widely accepted, or even much noticed, by the bulk of modern Plato scholarship, written by academic philosophers. Historians might like to suppose that Popper and Strauss are generally ignored because their views are demonstrably wrong on historical grounds: Popper’s position on Plato-as-reactionary was predicated on now-discredited images of early Greek society as overtly “tribal” and fourth-century Athens as characterized by decline and decay.⁴ Strauss’s hermetic Plato seems incredible in the face of the general openness of the Academy to Athenian society and the absence of any reliable evidence for public ire or action against Plato or anyone else—save Socrates—based on their engagement in philosophical pursuits. Yet relatively few modern students of Plato concern themselves overmuch with the “tribalism” debate, or even with the Academy as an institution. Although there is a growing philosophical literature on the literary qualities of Plato’s dialogues, contextual questions (e.g., “freedom of thought and speech” in democratic Athens) are still generally left to historians.⁵ Gregory

³ Strauss, *Natural Right*, and *City*, esp. 122ff., 130–33. Holmes, “Truths for Philosophers,” is a detailed, if frankly hostile, review of Strauss’ thought and the “Straussian” school of political theory; cf. Holmes, “Aristippus” (criticisms of both Strauss and Popper); Burnyeat, “Sphinx With-out a Secret”; Susser, “Leo Strauss.” The notion that Socrates was a victim of unrestrained democracy (and therefore that his trial and execution demonstrate the moral bankruptcy of democracy as a form of government) has had a long and complex history: Roberts, *Athens on Trial*, index s.v. “Socrates.” Bibliography on Socrates as an enemy of democracy: Kraut, *Socrates*, 195 n. 4; Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 170 n. 16; cf. below, 4.n.14.

⁴ The concept of “early Greek tribalism” was debunked by Roussel, *Tribu et cité*; and Bourriot, *Recherches*. See further Finley, *Ancient History*, 90–93; Hedrick, “Phratry Shrines.”

⁵ Plato’s Academy in its fourth-century context and its relative openness (e.g., mentioned in fragments of Middle Comedy): Lynch, *Aristotle’s School*, 47–67, esp 56–59; Brunt, “Plato’s Academy,” esp. 284–85. Historians on freedom of speech and thought in Athens: Finley, “Freedom of

Vlastos' studies of the philosophy of Socrates represent a partial exception. Ignoring Strauss and rejecting most of Popper's conclusions, Vlastos presents the "Socrates" depicted in Plato's early dialogues as a quasi-liberal who respected Athenian constitutional arrangements and appreciated the freedom, openness, and diversity of Athenian society. Vlastos' Socrates (and by extension, Plato as author of the early dialogues) has no deep quarrel with democracy, and his critical voice is very much that of a friendly, "immanent" critic. For Vlastos, the trial and execution of Socrates were tragic errors, to be understood in terms of Athenian misapprehensions and the particular circumstances of the late fifth and early fourth centuries, rather than an indication that philosophy and democracy were incompatible.⁶

Meanwhile, contemporary political theorists have attempted to engage with some of the broader problems that exercised Popper, Strauss, and Vlastos, without accepting their perspectives on Plato's relationship to Athenian society. A scholarly tradition pioneered by Alvin Gouldner, and subsequently developed by Charles Taylor, sees Plato as contending with a "mantic" poetic tradition and a warrior-citizen morality that valued strength, courage, and the ability to do great deeds. This warrior tradition saw life's aim as fame and glory; it regarded the highest moral condition as strength capable of sweeping all opposition before itself. Taylor suggested that Plato discredited the poets and subsumed the warrior ethic under his doctrine of "spiritedness" (*thumos*).⁷ But this still misses the importance for Plato of the moral perspective of the fourth-century democracy, in which both freedom and equality were highly valued, the publicly acknowledged aim of life was to be at once a democratic (*dēmotikos*) and a moderate or "middling" (*metrios*) citizen, and the highest moral condition was concord (*homonoia*) among citizens. As the *Gorgias* makes eminently clear, the "warrior ideal" in democratic Athens was subsumed under this overarching democratic morality.⁸

More recently, studies by Peter Euben and Arlene Saxonhouse (among others) have argued that Plato's Socrates was not antidemocratic, but was engaged in a fruitful dialogue with democracy, especially in the early and middle

the Citizen"; Dover, "Freedom of the Intellectual"; Wallace, "Private Lives." The conflict between "analytical" and "literary" approaches to Plato: Halliwell, "Review of *Cambridge Companion to Plato*." But see, recently, Nussbaum *Fragility of Goodness*; Nightingale, *Genres*; Rutherford, *Art of Plato*; Kahn, *Plato*.

⁶ Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist*, 45–80 (esp. 48), "Historical Socrates," "Political Obedience," and "Theory of Social Justice." For a spectrum of opinions on Vlastos on Plato, Socrates, and democracy, see Irwin, "Socrates and Athenian Democracy"; Nehamas, "Voices of Silence"; Wallace, "Philosophy and Democracy"; Wood, "Socrates and Democracy."

⁷ Gouldner, *Enter Plato*; Taylor, *Sources*, 115–26, esp. 117. The emphasis on the polis as a staging ground for the appearance of glorious, memorable deeds is also central to the political theory developed by Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* and *Between Past and Future*, partially in response to Plato's rejection of politics as praxis; see Villa, *Arendt*, esp. 82–89.

⁸ The impact of Athenian political culture on Plato's thought is appreciated by, inter alios, Wood, *Peasant-Citizen*, 146–50; Farrar, "Ancient Greek Political Theory," esp. 18, 28–29.

dialogues.⁹ They suggest that because of its polyphonic character, its willingness to put ideas at risk, and its determination to use language for contestation of received truths rather than for domination of others by the establishment of a truth regime, Platonic dialectic offers important resources for democratic thinking—even as it exposes the misuse of rhetorical techniques by Pericles and other Athenian political leaders. For Euben, democracy and dialectic alike demand the ability to see things from another's perspective. Euben's Socrates does not attempt to control the interpretations of his listeners; rather, he draws attention to the incomplete nature of his own arguments and democratically urges each Athenian to achieve self-mastery and to remain suspicious of claims to mastery made by the apparently seamless arguments offered by corrupt, Sophist-trained political orators. Hence, even in the *Republic*, Plato's use of the dialectical form means that he can offer no final political *technē* or fixed vision of truth. And thus, his dialogues can be read both contextually and theoretically, and they offer resources for a wide array of political projects.

From the point of view of the intellectual historian interested in Plato and Athenian democracy, Euben's position can be criticized on the grounds that it is a modern (or postmodern) vision of democratic discourse (a conversational willingness to contest meanings), rather than the democracy of fourth-century Athens (the rule of the *demos* and its power to establish meanings), to which his Socrates remains open.¹⁰ Yet Euben's work (and that of other political theorists working along similar lines) has helped to reopen the issue of the literary complexity of Plato's work and exposes the lack of consensus in modern opinion on the subject of where to place Plato on the "antagonist spectrum" — despite the relatively rich contextual tradition. My own position on Plato's Socrates has affinities to the work of Sheldon Wolin, Harvey Yunis, and Andrea Nightingale. Wolin argues that Plato's engagement with democracy should be regarded as inaugurating a tradition of "epic theory" — theoretical writing that attempts to change the world itself through the most profound of critical investigations. Yunis places Plato's political thought in a productive relationship with other fifth- and fourth-century Athenian writers concerned with the specific problems of democratic leadership and the role of political rhetoric. Nightingale discusses Plato's attempt to "invent" philosophy as a "radically different discursive practice" in contradistinction to both democratic practice and established Athenian literary genres, in part by incorporating elements of other genres into his texts.¹¹

The problem of deciding what Plato thought about politics and how he came

⁹ Recent work on Plato by political theorists who reject the notion that Plato was "antidemocratic" includes Euben, "Reading Democracy" and *Corrupting Youth*; Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy*, 87–114; Monoson, "Frank Speech"; Rocco, *Tragedy and Enlightenment*, 68–135; Wallach, "Plato's Socratic Problem."

¹⁰ See Barber, "Misreading."

¹¹ Nightingale, *Genres* (quote: 5); Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," and *Politics and Vision*, esp. 28–68; Yunis, *Taming*.

to think it is complicated by the great volume of his philosophical output, much of which touches on moral and political issues, and by the difficulty of organizing that corpus chronologically. Although it is probable that Plato wrote over the span of a half-century (ca. 399–347), there are relatively few clear internal or external pointers by which to seriate the body of his work, or assign close absolute dates to specific texts. I follow the modern consensus, which groups the dialogues into early, middle, and late periods. The *Apology* and *Crito* are generally accepted as early dialogues. The *Gorgias* (and perhaps *Republic*, book 1) is either late in the early period or early in the middle period. The *Republic* (books 2–10) belongs to the middle period and is somewhat later than the *Gorgias*. The chronological issue is related to and aggravated by Plato's choice of Socrates as a central figure in his dialogues: How much of what Socrates espouses is Socrates-not-Plato, how much Socrates-and-Plato, how much Plato-not-Socrates? Do the later (less genuinely Socratic?) dialogues stake out significantly different philosophical ground from that of the earlier works? Could arguments enunciated by "later Socrates" sometimes even criticize positions that "earlier Socrates" had implicitly accepted or explicitly proposed?¹² In the end, literary chronology is not central to my argument: I suppose that certain of the relatively clear political and ethical positions Socrates sets out in the *Apology* and *Crito* are complicated by the arguments he makes in the *Gorgias*, and at least partially refuted by lines of argument more fully developed in the *Republic*. This might well reflect Plato's evolving philosophical stance, but it is not difficult to imagine other scenarios that would account for the same phenomena. The key point, for our present purposes, is that the four dialogues in question are thematically linked and productively read in conjunction with one another.¹³

These difficulties and disagreements aside, it is not particularly controversial to claim that the four texts under consideration here are critical of democracy in general and of Athenian democracy in particular, and that their author can be broadly characterized as a critic of popular rule. In a number of well-known passages, Plato's Socrates dissects democratic practice as he experienced and understood it, and exposes what he takes to be the logical contradictions (and hence fundamental irrationality) within its central premises: the idea that the masses might manifest a form of wisdom when they gather in political Assem-

¹² Dating of dialogues and the Plato/Socrates problem: Guthrie, *History*, 4: 39–72; Brandwood, *Chronology*. Succinct surveys: Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 1–13; Allen, *Dialogues*, 13–16; Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 11–13; Kahn, *Plato*, 42–48.

¹³ Other scenarios: one might posit an *agōn* between the deceased "teacher" and his student (which would hardly be unusual in classical Greek culture). In this case, Plato might have written the *Apology* and *Crito* after the *Republic* in order to draw a distinction between the premises on which the historical Socrates felt it necessary to act in certain ways (criticize and die for his criticism) and the very different premises for action developed in the course of the thought experiment of the *Republic*. Kahn (*Plato*, 127–28) notes the close thematic relationship between the four dialogues discussed here, while rejecting (passim) the notion that the different stances taken in them are to be attributed to Plato's intellectual development.

bly, and so prove capable of deciding for themselves what would be best for the polis, is shown to be faulty by the analogy of the essential role played by technical expertise in other areas of endeavor (e.g., horse-raising and medicine). Since true experts in these and other fields are always rare, and those without expertise are acknowledged to be incompetent to practice within the field, so, too, should it be with politics. Yet democracy does not allow for, or even tolerate, true political experts. The popular leaders of the democracy, the *rhētores*, do not provide the requisite political expertise, because their particular area of ability, that is, rhetoric, is not properly a science securely based on certain knowledge (*epistēmē*), nor is it a skill capable of giving a reasoned account of its own procedures (*technē*), but rather it is a mere knack gained by practical experience (*empeiria*). Ergo democracy was by definition the irrational practice of politics by incompetents, and its putative leaders (including Themistocles and Pericles) were either scoundrels or fools.

Moreover, according to Plato, democracy could not hope to provide a truly workable political system, since it was based on the faulty premise that a given individual can do more than one thing well—that is, that those who spent most of their time in some specialized economic occupation could make good public policy in their (limited, but nonetheless overample) spare time. The Athenian Assembly and courts were necessarily made up of men who made their living as (for example) farmers, shoemakers, ship pilots, and oarsmen—rather than men who devoted themselves full-time to the problems of ruling. This system of rule by part-timers and amateurs was bound to be a mess if, as Plato's Socrates argues, it is a demonstrable fact that each human being is capable of true expertise in only a single realm of endeavor. And, as portrayed by Plato, a mess it was: In the *Republic's* extended description of democracy in the Athenian style, he presents the system of popular rule as characterized by foolish and spurious equality (in that it gave those who were naturally unequals in ability an equal say in the running of the state) and by such wild excesses of freedom (i.e., masterlessness) that women and slaves had no sense of decorum and even draft animals thought it beneath their dignity to make way for humans on the open road. Whether or not Plato was an implacable enemy of democracy, and despite the fact that he chose to live most of his life in democratic Athens, surely no reader of this text could suppose that its author was an avid supporter of the political status quo.¹⁴

¹⁴ Plato's Socrates on Athenian democracy: Guthrie, *History*, 3: 413; Vlastos, "Historical Socrates" (with reviews cited above, 4.n.6). Kraut, *Socrates*, 9, 194–244, 304–9; Reeve, *Socrates*, xii–xiii, 100–103; Hansen, *Trial of Socrates* (contrasting Xenophon's and Plato's Socrates, and, contra Vlastos, opting for the former as more true to the historical original); Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* 69–87, and *Plato's Socrates*, 157–66 (arguing that Socrates of the middle dialogues is distinctly more hostile to democracy than Socrates of the early dialogues, in which Socrates is a cogent and quite sympathetic critic but not an enemy). A key issue (emphasized by Kraut, *Socrates*, 226–28) is whether Socrates supposes that moral experts actually do exist; as long as he does not believe that they exist, he may prefer democracy to other regimes because it leaves citizens free to question the values inculcated by their early education.

Nor is it particularly provocative to suggest that Plato's relationship to Athenian democracy was strongly influenced by the indictment, conviction, and execution of Socrates at the hands of the democratic people's court in 399 B.C. Plato chose Socrates as his central literary figure as soon as he began writing dialogues (probably shortly after 399) and maintained him in that position through most of his own career as a writer. Plato wrote a quartet of texts (*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Phaedo*) that took as their setting Socrates' dramatic last days: indictment, trial, incarceration, and death. In the *Gorgias*, Plato's Socrates explicitly discusses the likelihood that he will be killed by the democratic state (see below, 4.C.4). These well-known facts are certainly adequate to demonstrate that Socrates and the circumstances of his demise had a profound impact on Plato, and that the effect lasted at least through his middle period.¹⁵

A.2. *Toward Political Philosophy: The Seventh Letter*

In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato (or Ps.-Plato if the letter is an ancient forgery) suggests that the trial of Socrates was instrumental in changing Plato's own opinions about the moral character of the restored democratic regime and caused him to abandon a prior inclination to seek an active, participatory, leadership role in Athenian politics.¹⁶ Plato states that when he was a young man (*neos*), he thought, like many others, that as soon as he was his own master (*kurios*) he would immediately enter public life (*ta koina tēs poleōs*, 324b). But then there was a revolution in the much-reviled (democratic) *politeia*, which resulted in the rule of the Thirty, among whom were some of Plato's associates and relatives. Plato was invited to participate in the new government, and so "I gave my mind over to them, very diligently" (324c-d). But Plato quickly came to see that the government of the Thirty was corrupt—~~it~~ made the former democracy look like an "age of gold" in comparison. He cites as a prime example of the crimes of the Thirty the fact that they dispatched Socrates, "an aged friend of mine, who I should hardly be ashamed to say was the most just man of his time," on a mission to arrest an innocent man. Their goal was to implicate Socrates in their crimes (324d–325a). And thus, disgusted by the abuses of those days, young Plato withdrew from all active involvement with the Thirty. The oligarchic regime soon fell, and:

¹⁵ See, for example, *Meno* 89e–95a: Socrates debates the education of children with Anytus and "slanders" great Athenian politicians of the past, and Anytus delivers a veiled threat against Socrates; *Phaedo* 118a: Socrates is described as the bravest, wisest, and most upright man of his time. Cf. Friedländer, *Plato*, 3–12, 126–36. I do not propose to address Plato's late period or the problem of why Socrates does not appear in the *Laws*, although see below, 4.n.136.

¹⁶ I assume that the *Seventh Letter* either was written by Plato or was a product of the early Academy. See further Souilhé (*Platon: Lettres*, xl–lviii) and Morrow (*Plato's Epistles*, 3–16, 44–60), who argue vigorously in favor of authenticity. Edelstein (*Plato's Seventh Letter*, esp. 1–12, 56–69) argues that the letter is not by Plato himself, but supposes it was written within a decade or two of his death by a highly intelligent partisan of the Academy. Brunt ("Plato's Academy," 313–25) defends the authenticity of the letter against Edelstein, claiming (325) that it is "true to [Plato's] own recollections and provides insight into his mentality." Kahn (*Plato*, 48 n. 22) has "no doubt that the letter was written by Plato."

Once more, less hastily this time, but surely, I was moved by the desire (*epithumia*) to take part in public life and in politics (*prattein ta koina kai politika*). To be sure, in those days too, full of disturbances as they were, there were many things occurring to cause offense, nor is it surprising that in time of revolution men in some cases took undue revenge on their enemies. Yet for all that the restored exiles [democrats] displayed great moderation (*epieikeia*). As it chanced, however, some of those in control (*dunasteuontes tines*) summoned this man, our comrade (*hetairoi*), Socrates, to the lawcourt, bringing against him a most sacrilegious charge, which Socrates least of all men deserved. These [leaders] put him on trial for impiety and those [the people] condemned him and put to death the man who had refused to take part in the unholy arrest of one of the friends of the exiles [the democrats of Phyle], who, being in exile, were suffering misfortunes themselves. (325a–c)

This event led Plato to rethink his decision to engage actively in democratic politics. Moreover, over the years it became clear to him that it would not be easy to change the government for the better, given the unlikelihood of finding an adequate number of trustworthy associates:

Now as I considered these matters, as well as the sorts of men who were active in politics (*prattontes ta politika*), and the laws and the customs, the more I examined them and the more I advanced in years, the harder it appeared to me to administer the government correctly (*orthōs*). For one thing, nothing could be done without friends and loyal comrades (*aneu philōn andrōn kai hetairōn pistōn*), and such men were not easy to find ready at hand, since our polis was no longer administered according to the standards and practices of our fathers (*paterōn*); while to acquire other new friends with any facility was impossible (*adunaton*). Furthermore, the written law and the customs were being corrupted at an astounding rate. (325c–d)

As a result of his observations, strongly reminiscent of Ps.-Xenophon's aporetic conclusions, Plato decided that the best course was for him to withdraw from most forms of political life, and he abandoned the hope that the constitution could be thoroughly reformed by his efforts:

The result was that I, who had at first been full of eagerness (*hormē*) for a public career (*prattein ta koina*), as I gazed upon the whirlpool of public life and saw the incessant movement of shifting currents, at last felt dizzy, and while I did not cease to consider means of improving this particular situation, and indeed of reforming the whole *politeia*, yet, in regard to action (*tou prattein*), I kept waiting for favorable moments, and finally saw clearly in regard to all poleis now existing that without exception, their system of government is bad (*kakōs . . . politeuontai*).¹⁷ (325e–326a).

¹⁷ Trans. L. A. Post (Loeb: adapted). The *Seventh Letter* is, of course, far from a transparent description of Plato's life; it discredits democracy's moral victory in 403 by equating the mistreatment of Socrates by democrats with the various crimes of Athenian oligarchs. In this project, the man Socrates is raised to the moral equivalent of the polis itself, and so the execution of Socrates by democrats proves that the democrats were just as careless of citizen life and other polis values as were the Thirty with their multiple murders, mass exiles, and confiscations of property. Plato's choice of philosophy over politics, and the contrast of his way of life to that chosen by the histori-

The upshot of these deliberations, Plato goes on to say, was to treat philosophy as a detached vantage point from which to consider issues of justice, at least until the fortuitous coming of the reign of the philosopher-king (326a–b).

These passages of the *Seventh Letter* suggest that the death of Socrates was the central determining factor in Plato's relationship to politics generally, and to Athenian politics particularly. The excesses of the Thirty, and especially their mistreatment of Socrates, had turned young Plato against hard-line oligarchy. In the several years between the fall of the Thirty and the trial of Socrates, Plato had been sufficiently impressed by the moderation of the restored democracy to contemplate seeking a leading role in the public life of his polis, that is, to become a *rhētōr*. Yet those ambitions were dashed by the indictment of Socrates by Athenian politicians and his subsequent conviction and execution by the demos.¹⁸ After 399, Plato became increasingly convinced that the general corruption of mores rendered direct action on his part chimerical, and so his vision of philosophy evolved into the search for a clear "view from nowhere," a vantage point beyond perception and opinion that would allow him and like-minded men to consider justice in the abstract, rather than working for justice in the real world of the polis-as-it-is.

The testimony of the *Seventh Letter* is potentially important in assessing Plato's relationship to democratic politics in his native city. If it is an accurate description of Plato's political evolution, it suggests that Plato was not convinced to abandon politics by anything that Socrates said or taught by example (i.e., by his argument [*logos*] or way of life [*bios*]), but rather by the fact (*ergon*) of his ultimate fate. And thus a distinction can be drawn between the historical Socrates, whose actual teaching (to the extent that Plato absorbed it) was not necessarily antithetical to the active engagement in political activity in a democracy by someone like Plato, and the works of Plato himself, which were written in the shadow of what he regarded as the judicial murder of the best of men. "Socrates" (Plato's character) expounds his arguments in light of a devastating fact that Socrates (the man) did not actually know until the very end of his life. It is the monstrous *ergon* of the circumstances surrounding Socrates' death that stands between teacher and student, as well as between the might-have-been Plato (the philosophical politician) and the real Plato (the political philosopher).¹⁹ In sum, the *Seventh Letter* indicates that Socrates' death was a

cal Socrates, is clarified by Hirschman (*Exit, Voice, Loyalty*), who argues that dissidents typically choose to remain loyal critics ("voice") over "exit" if they believe that their complaints will lead to change at a relatively low cost to themselves. The death of Socrates demonstrated just how high the cost of exercising a critical voice might be. Compare Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 28–68. Contrast Farrar, *Origins*, 265–72: The "retreat from politics" by Plato and Aristotle is a response to a (putatively) crumbling fourth-century political community.

¹⁸ Plato was twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old in 399 B.C., thus on the verge of what the Athenians regarded as mature manhood, just at the point at which he might well hope and plan to begin making his mark in politics. On coming of age, socially and politically, in Athens: Strauss, *Fathers and Sons*.

¹⁹ Edelstein (*Plato's Seventh Letter*, 6–7) notes that the biographical tradition deriving from Aristotle *Metaphysics* (1.6.987a29ff.), which includes Diogenes Laertius 3.4–6, says nothing about Plato's early ambitions. But the tradition of philosophical biography deriving from Aristotle was

key aspect of the “Socrates and Athens” problem, and that this problem was a monumental one for Plato. Much of his philosophical career was spent attempting to solve it.

Even if the *Seventh Letter* were not the product of Plato’s own pen, it would be important as the genuine product of fourth-century Greek culture, in which it was supposed that Plato could have and indeed should have written such a letter in order to explain his relative lack of political involvement in his native polis.²⁰ The letter takes young Plato to be in some important ways at one with Plato’s depiction of Socrates in the *Apology* and *Crito*: a loyal citizen of his polis, with the citizen’s normal and expected interest in improving the polis through political activity. It makes Platonic philosophy (especially the attempt to achieve the view from nowhere) into an alternative politics (rather than a nonpolitical alternative to civic life) and thereby gives philosophy a political agenda. The dialogues that touch on moral and political issues do nothing to dispel the conviction that Plato devoted a great deal of intellectual effort to resolving the problem raised for him by the events of 399 B.C. These dialogues may be read as installments in Plato’s grand project of establishing secure foundations for a respectable alternative to active engagement in the politics of the polis-as-it-is.

The “Socrates and Athens” problem was actually a double or even a quadruple one. First, why did the Athenian democracy act as it did (the leaders in indicting Socrates and the people in convicting him), and why did Socrates act as he did (first conducting his defense in an idiosyncratic manner unlikely to win the sympathy of his judges and then refusing to escape from prison before the unjust death sentence could be carried out)? The multifaceted problem required the investigation of circumstances prior to the events of 399. What was Socrates’ relationship to the political society he inhabited, and why did the relationship end in the violent denouement of his execution? Or put in another way: Was the practice of Socratic-style philosophy bound to come into conflict with the practice of Athenian-style democratic politics? While it would be reductive in the extreme to claim that solving this complex problem is *all* that is going on in the four dialogues under consideration here, a reading that centers on how these texts answer Plato’s “Socrates and Athens” question can tell us a good deal about Plato as a critic of popular rule.

B. GADFLY ETHICS

In 399 B.C. a certain Meletus, supported by the politicians Anytus and Lycon, indicted Socrates under a *graphē asebeias* (public legal action related to impiety), claiming that he corrupted the youth, disbelieved the state gods, and introduced new gods. After preliminary investigation by the relevant Athenian mag-

interested in Plato as a philosopher, not as a might-have-been democratic politician; see Brunt, “Plato’s Academy,” 314.

²⁰ Cf. Morrow, *Plato’s Epistles*, 122: “This [referring to *Letter 7*, 330d–331d] is clearly a bit of an apology, an answer to the critics who accused him of inconsistency or lack of patriotism in not entering political life at Athens.” See further below, 7.B.

istrate (the *basileus*), the case was turned over to the *dikastēria*. A jury of 500 citizens over age thirty was empaneled; prosecutor and defendant presented their cases in the form of timed speeches. Each jurymen then cast his ballot for the defendant or prosecutor. Ballots were counted and the verdict announced. Because the *graphē asebeias* was classified under Athenian law as an *agōn timētos*, no fixed penalty was prescribed by law. Thus, after a majority of the jurymen voted that Socrates was guilty, prosecutor and defendant presented competing proposals for punishment. This second pair of speeches was followed by a second balloting of the jurors, who voted in favor of Meletus' proposed death sentence. Socrates was subsequently remanded to the state prison, where the sentence was carried out on the first auspicious day. The entire procedure was legal and orderly; Socrates was condemned by the ordinary processes of the Athenian state, not by a lynch mob. The action was, however, unusual in that the defendant was neither wealthy nor politically prominent in the ordinary sense. Public legal actions (including *graphai*) were used primarily by and against elite Athenians: the rich and politically ambitious.²¹

B.I. *Doing Good: Apology*

Plato's *Apology of Socrates* purports to be Socrates' initial speech of defense, his second speech responding to Meletus' call for his execution, and an informal (legally irrelevant) address to the jurors following the jury's second vote in favor of the prosecution. Socrates' first speech conforms quite closely in form and even in style to other surviving examples of Athenian dicanic oratory.²² The text calls attention to itself because it is unique in the Platonic corpus in taking the generic form of a public address (a formal speech to an official decision-making body) rather than a private dialogue.²³ While it is not possible to determine how accurate the *Apology* is as a record of how Socrates actually defended himself; it is, I think, safe to claim that the text is an accurate record of Plato's initial take on the "Socrates and Athens" problem: Socrates sketches out

²¹ *Graphē asebeias*: Cohen, "Prosecution of Impiety"; Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 24–37; Todd, *Shape*, 307–12. The immediate postwar period saw a rash of such cases: Connor, "Other 399"; for the general religious context (with special reference to the sensitive issue of "introducing new gods"): Parker *Athenian Religion*, 199–217. The charge of "corrupting youth" and Athenian concerns for paternal authority: Strauss, *Fathers and Sons*, 199–211. It was fairly rare for convictions in *graphai* to end in the carrying out of a death penalty; the norm was a monetary fine (which might be so heavy as to force the defendant into exile or so light as to be little more than a slap on the wrist). For the ideology and practice of Athenian punishment, see Allen ("Situation of Punishment"), who notes the apparent rarity of hemlock poisoning as a means of execution.

²² Greek edition with notes: Burnet, *Plato's*. Translation with notes: Allen, *Dialogues*, 61–104. Literary and philosophical commentary: de Strycker and Slings, *Plato's "Apology."* On the rhetoric of Socrates' *Apology*: Burnet, *Plato's*, 67–68; Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 48–59. We do not have other examples of second speeches in *agones timetoi*, nor of postconviction addresses to a jury, and so we cannot say how typical or atypical the second and third parts of the *Apology* may have been in form or style.

²³ Cf. Kahn, *Plato*, 88–89.

the case against himself, and identifies his own bad reputation among the Athenian citizenry as the real issue in the case. The ultimate source of this widespread and ultimately deadly resentment and distrust of Socrates is located by him in the deeply ingrained assumptions and practices of the democratic Athenian *politeia* itself.

The 500 jurors in Socrates' case were ordinary Athenian men and probably represented a reasonable cross-section of citizen society. Most would have had to work for a living, a few might be genuinely destitute, a few others perhaps were of the leisure class. None was a legal "professional," but most were very experienced consumers of public rhetoric, knowledgeable in the ways that Athenians (and especially elite Athenians and politicians) attempted to persuade mass audiences through speech in courtroom and Assembly.²⁴ When he entered the courtroom, the typical Athenian juror already knew the elaborate unwritten rules of the game and expected the litigants to play by them. There were accepted rhetorical conventions to be observed; many jurors must have settled comfortably into their seats when Socrates opened his defense with the well-known gambit of claiming to be a quiet private citizen, unfamiliar with the courts, innocent of rhetorical skill or training, who found himself confronted with highly skilled and experienced opponents (17a–d). This particular *topos*, and others like it, served to establish the speaker's adherence to a generally accepted and specifically democratic code of belief and behavior. Along with explicit claims to having performed services for the polis appropriate to one's social station, rhetorical *topoi* were intended to integrate the interests of speaker and audience. The establishment of the speaker's credentials as a useful citizen who adhered to standard democratic norms of belief and behavior would be interwoven with the substantive case establishing a defendant's technical innocence. What the Athenian jury expected, then, was for Socrates to try to show through rhetoric that the specific charges were without factual basis, and furthermore that they were incredible given his standing as a loyal citizen of the democratic polity. He should, moreover, explain how the baseless charges came to be lodged against him, in the process exposing his accusers as scoundrels who were corruptly willing, even viciously eager, to undermine democratic ideology and practice. Finally, he might try to show that his own behavior consistently conformed to a model of socially constructed and socially maintained citizen dignity, while his opponents threatened the security of each citizen by brazenly violating public standards.²⁵

The *Apology* presents a Socrates who is very well aware of these conventions and expectations (he had "often" been present at trials of others, 35a) –and

²⁴ Composition of Athenian juries: Markle, "Jury Pay"; Ober *Mass*, 141–44; Todd, "Lady," and *Shape*, 82–89.

²⁵ The conventionality of Socrates' proemium: Burnet, *Plato's*, 67; Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, esp. 52 n. 11, 53, 58; Reeve, *Socrates*, 4–9. Function of *topoi*: Ober, *Mass*, and *Athenian Revolution*, 86–106; Morris, "Power." Hall, "Lawcourt Dramas," is a lively attempt to evoke the atmosphere of a typical Athenian trial, emphasizing the importance of performance and the analogy of drama.

more than willing to confound them. Socrates' speech is a rhetorical masterpiece. But by its end he has not aligned himself with the mass of his fellow citizens nor with the democratic *politeia*. Indeed, he has proved quite conclusively that his own political convictions are drastically at odds with popular ideology, and that his irritating, idiosyncratic everyday practice of examining his fellow Athenians (and finding them painfully wanting in wisdom) followed necessarily from those convictions. He has demonstrated that he is, by his own lights, a patriotic citizen who cares deeply about the good of his polis and who consistently acts in what he sees as its best interests—but also that given his definition of patriotism, he must be regarded as a *uniquely* patriotic Athenian. Moreover, given the corrupt condition of the polis, doing good means questioning the most fundamental of ideological beliefs in conversations held in public and private spaces of the city.

By the end of the *Apology*, Socrates has shown that his primary accuser is an ignorant fool, but a fool appropriate to business as usual in the democratic state. He has established that he himself is a dignified private citizen rather than a pandering politician. But in the process, he has also revealed that an active political life that included advising the demos in the citizen Assembly is simply impossible for a just man, since a just politician would be intolerable to the democracy and quickly killed. Finally, he has shown that true dignity was not a social matter at all, but rather an affair of the individual soul. In sum, Socrates portrays himself as a civic-minded activist who seeks to improve the polis and himself (*humas . . . ὀφελῆκῃ . . . kai hemauton*, 31d) through verbal engagement with his fellows.²⁶ Thus his position initially appears quite analogous to that claimed by the ordinary Athenian politician, the *rhētōr*. Yet “Socratic politics” abjures seeking to persuade mass audiences of decision-makers, and Socratic ethics is a matter of private conscience rather than social control. These points will have been securely established for a sympathetic reader (which I take to be Plato's intended audience); they would be regarded as arrogant and potentially subversive assertions by unsympathetic jurors who regarded persuasive public speeches and social control as essential bulwarks of the democratic order.²⁷

²⁶ The devotion of Socrates (of Plato's *Apology* and *Crito*) to improving his fellow Athenians is defended (on various grounds) by Strauss, *City*, 73–77; Vlastos, “Historical Socrates,” 103; Kraut, *Socrates*, 229 n. 67; Reeve, *Socrates*, 155–60; Yunis, *Taming*, 153–56; Miller, “Arguments,” 135–36; White, “Plato's *Crito*,” 120–22. Contrast Nehamas *Art of Living*, ch. 6), who argues for a Socrates whose primary concern is the care of his own soul, who is free from “civic” concerns, and who converses almost uniquely with members of the intellectual elite—i.e., those whose conversation might help him to better understand himself. I agree with Nehamas that Plato's Socrates' view of the individual's duty to himself was at odds with the ordinary Athenian's. But I regard Socrates of the early dialogues as believing that he has a moral duty to publicize his new vision, to make it potentially available to all Athenians, and that this is a duty owed to his community. Note that in his final address to those jurors who voted for acquittal (41e), Socrates requests that they help to educate his sons. This recalls the Athenian state's duty to raise the orphan sons of citizens who died in battle, fighting for the good of the community. Cf. below, 4.C, for the elaboration of Socratic battle metaphors in the *Gorgias*.

²⁷ The issue of Socrates' sincerity in attempting to convince the jurors is important to most

The defense speech centers on Socrates' discussion of his "new" and "old" accusers. This structuring technique can be read as a variation on the standard dicanic tactic of dealing both with the facts of the matter (the new) and with the defendant's reputation among the citizens (the old). The standard approach was to show that the current charges are at variance with the litigant's reputation: The prosecutor says I have done something wrong, but the deep and generalized knowledge of the polis about me as a citizen makes it highly unlikely that I did what he says. Thus you jurors must weigh my opponent's lying words against your own and your fellows' certain knowledge of me and mine (or at least your knowledge of the sort of person I show myself to be through my speech) and judge me accordingly. If there are nasty rumors about me floating around, these are the product of my opponent's slanders.²⁸ Socrates at first seems to be playing by the usual rules when, in responding to the old charges that he investigated things beneath the earth and in the sky, made the weaker argument defeat the stronger, and taught others to do likewise, Socrates denies them and appeals to public knowledge regarding his activities:

I offer the majority (*hoi polloi*) of you as witnesses, and I ask you to teach and advise (*didaskein kai phrazein*) one another; those among you who have heard me in conversation—there are many (*polloi*) of you—inform each other, please, whether any of you ever heard me discussing anything of that sort. (19d)

This call upon the jurymen-citizens as character witnesses sounds pretty standard, but Socrates immediately introduces a strange note: "From that [asking each other] you will come to know the status of the other things the multitude (*hoi polloi*) says about me" (19d). Rather than taking the expected line (by consulting public opinion you will learn that my current accusers are speaking falsely), Socrates asks the jurors to learn by individual investigation that the general opinion of the mass of citizens (*hoi polloi*) was false. He seeks, in effect, to establish a conversational, dialectical relationship among the jurors that privileges individual knowledge and rejects the general knowledge of the many as a mass. The key shift is in the status of the highly charged term *hoi polloi*: "many of you" have heard Socrates and should inform your fellow citizens of what you know of him in order to falsify the slanderous claims of "the

philosophical treatments of the *Apology*; see, for example, Reeve, *Socrates*, xiii. It is the burden of Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial* 1989, esp. 9, 37–47, 62, that Socrates sincerely sought to secure his acquittal and that his speech was designed to be as rhetorically persuasive as it was consistent with his own moral commitments. While I agree that Socrates would have preferred acquittal, all things being equal, I see his commitment to his critical gadfly role as requiring him to use the occasion of his trial as an educational public provocation. It is because he felt compelled to provoke rather than to assuage the concerns of his audience that he considered it highly unlikely that he would be acquitted. For hypothetical reconstructions of the prosecutors' case against Socrates, see Stone, *Trial of Socrates*; Hansen, *Trial of Socrates*. Stone makes the historical Socrates out to be a committed enemy of democracy, whereas Hansen concludes that, although Socrates himself was loyal to the democratic constitution, there was ample reason for the jurors to fear that his pungent criticisms of democratic institutions might threaten the restored democracy.

²⁸ The social function of rumor and gossip in Athens: above, 3.n.32.

many” generally. In this short passage, Socrates brings the positive democratic marking of *hoi polloi* into competition with the negative critical marking of the same term. The already foreshadowed outcome of the trial (the speech act of the jury) will decide the contest in favor of the critical reading for Plato’s reader.²⁹

Socrates explicitly accepts the priority in time and in importance to his case of deep-set public opinion (old accusers over new, 18a–c), but he turns the standard rhetorical tactic on its head by pointing out the general *congruity* between the current charges and the opinion of himself that the citizenry has formed over time: he points out that the old accusation that Socrates is an atheistic scientific investigator and a sophistical teacher is clearly and organically the basis of the current charges of impiety and corruption of the youth. The new accusers (the prosecutor and his associates) are the tip of a much larger iceberg: the prejudice that had been building against Socrates for a very long time. Socrates is interested in base rather than superstructure, so it is his bad general reputation in the polis that is his main concern.

Socrates professes to believe that he is not seriously endangered by the visible new accusers, who, despite their rhetorical skill (17b, 18b), could be refuted (at least to the philosopher’s satisfaction) by simple logic. Through cross-examination Socrates shows, for example, that Meletus believes that the Athenian Assemblymen, councilmen, and jurors all educate and improve the youth, while only Socrates corrupts them. This is shown to be illogical by an analogy with horse-training: it is “of course” true that only one or a few men know how to improve horses through training, while “*hoi polloi*, when they try to train horses, actually corrupt them, and the same is true of all other animals” (25a – b). The fact that Meletus will not acknowledge the force of this argument for the “training” of the Athenian youth shows that he has never given any thought to the subject of education (24e–25c). The problem with this line of reasoning, from the point of view of persuading the jury, is that most Athenian jurymen would be likely to agree with Meletus that the Assemblymen et alii *did* educate the youth through their decisions.³⁰ Thus either Socrates’ implied analogy between horses and youths is faulty, or most Athenians are convicted along with Meletus of giving no care to the education of the youth. Rather than cutting his opponent out from the popular herd, Socrates reveals clearly that his opponent’s

²⁹ Calling upon jurymen as character witnesses: Lys. 21.19; Dem. 18.10; cf. Ober, *Mass*, 149–50. Kraut (*Socrates*, 199–203) is quite right to suggest that the Socrates of the *Apology* and *Crito* does not share the standard overt aristocratic bias against manual labor and laborers (see above, 3.n.66, and below, 6.B.1), but his argument that Socrates’ use of the terms *hoi polloi* and *plēthos* is neutral (i.e., in no sense class-based) is not convincing. Cf. Vlastos, “Historical Socrates,” 98 –100.

³⁰ Collective wisdom and education of youth through decisions of public bodies: Ober, *Mass*, 157–65. Robb, “*Asebia* and *Sumousia*,” focuses on Socratic education as an *af* front to traditional (aristocratic) education, predicated on close association (*sunousia*) of the young man with his elders, at (e.g.) symposia; this approach risks assuming that Athenian culture is homogeneously aristocratic. Carawan (“*Erotesis*”) demonstrates that it was acceptable procedure for a defendant to cross-examine the prosecutor, as Socrates does Meletus. Reeve (*Socrates*, 102–7) attempts to save Plato’s Socrates from the evidently antidemocratic import of his comments, here and elsewhere.

views are yoked to those of most Athenians. The juror who is persuaded by Socrates will also set himself against the ordinary wisdom of the mass of citizens.

Socrates has thus set himself a staggering rhetorical challenge: in order to be acquitted, he must bring at least 250 individual jurors over to his side, after having reminded them in no uncertain terms that it is his opponent whose position is in conformity with popular opinion. Socrates must, in a very short time, persuade each juror to acknowledge that what he (the juror) and the citizen masses generally have learned since childhood about Socrates is fundamentally in error. This acknowledgment carries the burden of accepting that the way the citizens currently gain their knowledge about the affairs of the polis is faulty. Moreover, because of faulty knowledge, it is the citizens en masse who corrupt the youth of the polis (and by extension the polis as a whole), and only a truly knowledgeable man (Socrates?), or perhaps a few men (Socrates and those he has persuaded?), might be able to improve them.³¹

Having started off on this risky course, which he pointedly acknowledges is a difficult one and unlikely to end in acquittal (19a, 28a–b, 36a), Socrates might be expected to show that the old accusations should properly be discounted because they were circulated by tendentious enemies and/or incongruent with the deepest tenets of democratic ideology. But Socrates makes exactly the opposite point: except for an elliptical reference to Aristophanes' satirical portrait in the *Clouds*, he admits that he cannot name his "old accusers" or identify the source of the long-circulating rumors that accuse him (18c–d). Thus the jury is left to suppose that the rumors had arisen spontaneously among the citizens as a result of his behavior (i.e., subjecting those he met to his elenchus). This sort of spontaneous popular rumor is exactly the sort that the orator Aeschines (2.145), for example, would later claim had a divine status because it played such an important and legitimate role in the democratic polity. Far from attempting to refute that sort of assumption, Socrates embraces the fact that *in the opinion of the masses*, he was an enemy to the ideals of the democracy, and he states forthrightly that those who fell into popular suspicion were likely to be dealt with harshly:

But as I said before, a great deal of enmity has risen against me among many people (*pros pollous*), and you know very well that this is true. And that is what will convict me, if I am convicted—not Meletus, not Anytus, but the grudging slander and envy of *hoi polloi*. It has convicted many other good and decent men

³¹ On the difficult question of whether the Socrates of the early dialogues supposes himself to possess politically relevant moral knowledge, see Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist*, 53–80, 82–86; "Socrates' Disavowal"; "Historical Socrates," 103–7; "Paradox of Socrates" (Socrates might allow a limited role for the political expert, who will offer guidance and criticism and will inform and clarify the judgment of the layman, but he leaves the final decision to the layman); Kraut, *Socrates*, esp. 10, 208, 232, 243–309 (Socrates does not consider himself an expert and doubts that virtue could be taught; this sustains his satisfaction with Athenian democracy); Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 128–37 (summary of various positions); Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, 17–30, with literature cited. Happily, solving this problem is not central to my current project.

(*pollous kai allous kai agathous*); I think it will convict me; nor will it be surprising if it fails to stop with me. (28a–b)

The Athenian litigant, especially one accused in a *graphē* of a crime against the public, was expected to demonstrate his record of public duty and to show not only that he performed the officially mandated services to the state, but that he was a public benefactor. Once again, Socrates seems at first glance to be playing along. He refers with some pride to his record of military service and underlines that it was service to the democracy: “When the commanders that you (*humeis*) elected to command me stationed me at Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delion, I remained there like anyone else, and ran the risk of death” (28e). This appeal to one’s sterling military record is a familiar rhetorical topos (cf. Aeschines 2.168–70). But Socrates’ statement is embedded not in a standard list of state services, but in an explanation of why Socrates would refuse to obey a hypothetical gag order forbidding him to pursue his examination of Athenians. He holds obedience to his human superiors as a great good, but he regards his private order from “the god” as overriding any orders issued by Athenian legal authorities.³² That divine order was expressed by the oracle at Delphi in the form of a negative reply to the question (posed, on his own initiative, by Chaerephon, an old comrade [*hetairois*] of Socrates and well-known supporter of the democracy, 20e–21a) of whether anyone is wiser than Socrates. According to Socrates’ own interpretation, Apollo’s oracle was no mere factual declaration, but a speech act (an order) with clear illocutionary force, and he felt no need to defend his interpretation of it as such against

³² 29c–30b, cf. 37e–38a. Brickhouse and Smith *Socrates on Trial* 137–53) attempt to square Socrates’ conviction (which is central to the argument of the *Crito*: below, 4.B.2) that he must obey the law with his overt refusal to obey a hypothetical gag order by pointing out that Athenian procedure in an *agōn timetos* mandated that the jury decide between the penalties offered by the litigants, and made no provision for jury-mandated revisions in the sentence. Since Socrates knew the prosecutors would call for death, he was in no danger of being slapped with a gag order. Cf. Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato’s Socrates*, 141–49; Boegehold, “Resistance,” 210–13. I suppose that Socrates (or Plato’s Socrates) brought up the issue of the gag order *inter alia* because he guessed that some on the jury (or some potential readers) expected him to offer to take an oath forswearing public philosophizing as part of his proposed counterpenalty, and he wanted to establish by an *a fortiori* argument why this sort of compromise was morally impossible for him. Kraut (*Socrates*, 13–17) points out, however, that a law against philosophizing *could* be passed. I suggest that Socrates could ignore such a law without contradicting his position in the *Crito* on the following grounds: (1) the god ordered Socrates to philosophize; (2) to disobey a god’s order would be impious; (3) established Athenian law forbade impiety; (4) the (hypothetical) antiphilosophizing law, by mandating impiety, contradicted an established Athenian law; (5) according to fundamental Athenian law, a newly proposed law that contradicted an established law was not valid until the established law was formally repealed (see Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, 169, 175); (6) since only valid laws must be obeyed, Socrates need not obey the antiphilosophizing law, on the grounds of its procedural irregularity and consequent invalidity, until and unless the law against impiety were repealed (by majority vote of an established board of *nomothetai*). As the trial of Socrates itself demonstrates, the Athenians cared deeply about piety; repeal of the law against impiety is so far-fetched that it becomes uninteresting as a hypothetical. My thanks to Mary-Hannah Jones and Danielle Allen for discussion of this argument.

possible alternative readings.³³ But Delphic oracles are notoriously obscure and problematic as speech acts; it was unlikely to be self-evident to most of the jurors that by saying “no one” is wiser than Socrates the god had in fact clearly and specifically ordered Socrates ceaselessly to expose the ignorance and folly of his fellows. Thus the hypothetical conflict over whom to obey (public or divine authority) comes down to a conflict between an individual’s convictions regarding what constituted right behavior on the one hand, and the collective understanding represented by the opinion and will of the citizenry on the other (20e–21b, 28e–29a). It is not surprising, then, that Socrates must interrupt his description of the oracle with a request that the jurors not shout him down (21a).³⁴

Like other Athenian litigants, Socrates claims to be a selfless benefactor of the polis in that he had exhausted his private resources in the pursuit of the public good (23b–c, 30a, 31a–c). But the standard rhetorical claim was based on the transfer of material goods from the private estate of the litigant to the polis. Although his sense of public duty led directly to the neglect and consequent decline of his own private estate, Socrates never claimed to have given anything material to the state.³⁵ Instead, Socrates’ claim to be a public benefactor hangs from the rather tenuous thread of his reading of the Delphic oracle as an order. Since, according to Socrates’ understanding of divinity as simply just, truthful, and good (again, an idiosyncratic interpretation: 21b), the god must have willed something good by his order, Socrates’ irritating habit of investigating his fellows must be good for them. Because he does what is good for his fellow citizens (*astoi*)—for whom he feels regard, friendship (*humas* . . . as-

³³ It is quite ironic that Socrates takes what appears to be a referential statement (in the form “No p is greater than S in respect to attribute w”) as a performative order to embark upon a quest for secure referential meanings (in the form “What is ‘w-ness?’”). Socrates takes *sophos* (“wise person,” “sage”) to have to do with knowledge (albeit of ignorance), which is quite different from earlier and later interpretations (canonized in stories of the “Seven Sages”) of the *sophos* as possessor of a certain political or religious *technē* (cf. below, 4.C.4, on political *technē*). Socrates’ idiosyncratic interpretation of the god’s speech act leads him to search for reference (the attempt to find final definitions of abstract terms) rather than to engage in public performances of the sort typical of the “*sophos*-sage,” on which see Martin, “Seven Sages.” Brickhouse and Smith (*Socrates on Trial*, 88–100, 106–7) emphasize the importance of divine authority (oracle, dreams) as a foundation for Socrates’ “mission.” Indeed, one might suggest that the hierarchical relationship between the god and Socrates (the latter feels absolutely compelled to follow the former’s order) is a model for the authoritarian politics that Plato’s Socrates embraces in the *Republic*. On the authoritarian political tendency of Plato’s Socrates (i.e., his preference for a society ruled by true experts, like that of the *Republic*, over democratic license): Kraut, *Socrates*, 233–37. Cf. below, 4.n.49.

³⁴ The contrast is between the individual perceiving subject and the sort of intersubjectivity or “public seeing” (Barber *Strong Democracy*, 170–71) typical of Athenian democracy. Hansen (*Trial of Socrates*, 34) points out the peculiarity of Socrates’ interpretation of the oracle, suggesting that “the Oracle may just as well be taken to mean: ‘Socrates is just as wise as everybody else.’” Athenian jurors frequently engaged in a raucous vocal dialogue with litigants: Bers, “Dikastic Thorubos.” Other Socratic requests for quiet in the *Apology*: 27b, 30c.

³⁵ The standard claim to have spent one’s own resources on the public good: Ober, *Mass*, 226–33. Cf. Thrasymachus in *Rep.* 343e, who notes the inevitable decline of the just public magistrate’s *oikeia*: once again this points to Socrates’ mission as a public service.

pazomai men kai philō, 29d), and a special closeness due to kinship (*mou enguterō este genei*, 30a)—despite the danger to which this exposes him, Socrates is a benefactor who should be rewarded for inflicting therapeutic pain upon his fellows.³⁶ He explains his benefaction to the polis as analogous to the good done by a gadfly to

a large and well-bred horse, a horse grown sluggish because of its size and in need of being roused . . . I rouse you. I persuade you. I upbraid you. I never stop lighting on each one of you, everywhere, all day long. Such a one will not easily come to you again, gentlemen. . . . Perhaps you will swat me, persuaded by Anytus that you may lightly kill. Then you will continue to sleep out your lives, unless the god sends someone else to look after you. (30e–31a)

Socrates' return to an equine metaphor is tongue-in-cheek (*geloioteron eipein*, 30e), but it recalls the point of his earlier horse-training analogy: the mass of Athenian citizens, like their children, can best be regarded as a lazy beast in need of being disciplined by the rare individual who understands what is in fact good for them. On this reading, popular ideology is no better than a state of sleep, popular opinions are mere dreams. The people only come awake, and then momentarily, when stung by Socrates' elenchus. Left to their own devices, dreamers have no hope of properly running the affairs of the polis, much less of improving it. Once again, this is a hard pill for many jurors to swallow.

The juror who was still willing to give Socrates the benefit of the doubt might well ask, "If you wish to benefit the polis and are indeed so much cleverer than the rest of us, why don't you do what other clever and civic-minded citizens take it upon themselves to do: stand up in the Assembly and advocate specific policies that you believe will make the polis better?" (implied at 31c). Socrates had hinted at this problematic similarity of his role to that of the "professional" public speaker (*rhētōr*) in the proemium (18a), and the answer to this hypothetical question is forthcoming: Socrates could not in fact be a *rhētōr* because his personal *daimonion*, his divine and internal sign, had spoken against it (31d).³⁷ Socrates supposed that the *daimonion* had vetoed making

³⁶ On the use of the term *astoi*, which means either citizen, urban resident, or resident of the polis territory according to its context, see Cohen, "Astoi." Kraut (*Socrates*, 225) rightly points out that Socrates' benefaction to Athens is based on his "gift" of painful moral perplexity.

³⁷ The *daimonion* only prevented Socrates from engaging in action; it did not promote action (40a). Nor did it explain the reasons for its vetoes: Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 168–70. Whether its vetoes can be counted as knowledge is more problematic: *ibid.*, 237–57, with Vlastos, "Review of Brickhouse and Smith," (*Studies in Greek Philosophy*, 25–30). It is important to note that Socrates makes it clear in this passage that what the *daimonion* forbade was addressing public decision-making assemblies (*dēmosiai de ou tolmō anabainōn eis to plēthos to humeteron sumbouleuein tēi polei*), and so speech to public assemblies (*dēmēgoria*) is here equated with "practicing politics" (*ta politika prattein*). Yet when Socrates says that he gives advice and "busies himself with the affairs of others" (*polupragmonō*) in private (*idiai*, 31c) we need not suppose that these are conversations held uniquely in private homes—rather, it means that the conversations are one-on-one and intended to gain understanding, rather than to effect a public decision. Some of

public speeches to mass audiences on the prudential grounds that a just man will quickly be killed (and thus be prevented from helping himself or others) if he enters democratic politics:

You know quite well, Athenians, that if I had long ago attempted to engage in public affairs (*prattein ta politika pragmata*), I would long ago have been killed and so would not have been of any benefit to you or myself. Please do not be angry with me for telling the simple truth. It is impossible for any man to be spared if he openly (*gnēsīōs*) opposes you or any other mass of men (*plēthos*), and prevents many unjust and illegal things from occurring in his polis. (31d–e)

As proof of this contention, Socrates offers his own experience as *bouleutēs* (member of the Council of 500) in 406 B.C. When serving as *prutanis* (a member of a “presidential committee” of the council, responsible for running a particular meeting of the Assembly), he was expected to bring forward for a vote by the Assembly a motion to execute eight Athenian generals for malfeasance after the battle of Arginousai. Socrates regarded the collective punishment as illegal and voted against bringing it forward. As a result, the *rhētores*, encouraged by “your shouts and bellowing,” planned to arrest him (32b –c). This notorious event, which happened “under the democracy,” is paired with Socrates’ refusal to take an order from the Thirty to arrest Leon of Salamis and bring him to Athens for execution (32c–d).

Now, an Athenian standing trial on a public charge of “introducing new gods” is certainly not following a traditional rhetorical strategy when he boasts that he follows the commands of a divine inner voice. That his rhetorical strategy not only violates the expected approach but inverts it becomes clear when he ascribes to that voice a conviction that the popular will and justice are simply incompatible, when he reminds the jurors that “they” had called for his own arrest in 406, and when he implies a moral equivalence between the democratic Assembly and the Thirty.

The peroration of his first speech gave Socrates one last chance to confound the expectations of his judges. An Athenian defendant, perhaps especially one whose substantive case was weak, might wind up his plea to the jury with a family tableau; the display in court of young sons, relatives, and friends was an

these conversations certainly took place in the *agora* (an area with strong democratic associations: Steiner, *Tyrant's Writ*, 216–20) and other public places: “In the *agora*, near the bankers’ tables, where many of you have heard me” (*Apol.* 17c). Cf. *Grg.* 522b: Socrates speculates that he will be accused of uttering harsh words “either in private or in public (*dēmosiai*)”; Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.10: Socrates conversed in gymnasia, in the *agora* whenever it was full, and in general wherever most people were to be found; Diogenes Laertius 2.21: it was Socrates’ habit to philosophize at workshops (*ergastēria*) and in the *agora*. If, when Socrates converses in public, onlookers choose to gather and watch the elenchus (which surely was the case and why Socrates can say that “many of you have heard me”), that is all fine and well because they are not for gathered as a decision-making body; cf. Reeve, *Socrates*, 155–60. Vlastos, “Socrates in Vietnam” (in *Socratic Studies*, 127–33), wrestles with Socrates’ unwillingness actively to resist public injustices by public speech.

expression of solidarity with the demos as a putative kinship group and reminded the jury of the consequences to the polis of removing the head of an *oikos*.³⁸ Socrates pointedly refuses to engage in this touching ritual (34c–e). The bare fact of his refusal to bring out his family is not necessarily evidence of a contrarian tendency. As prosecutor, Demosthenes (21.186–88) once argued that the jurors should weigh the spectacle of the defendant surrounded by his family against the imaginary spectacle of the prosecutor surrounded by the Laws of Athens—which suggests that the tableau tactic might be turned against a defendant by a clever opponent. Rather, it is the terms in which Socrates makes his refusal that underlines the opposition between himself and the mores of the demos.

Instead of simply saying, “I won’t be bringing on my three sons,” Socrates pointedly reminds the members of the jury that they themselves may have used the tableau tactic (34c). He then claims that such behavior in *his* case would be shameful (*aischron*) and offensive to his personal reputation (*doxa*) and that of the polis. Why? Because, rightly or wrongly, he is widely regarded as a superior sort of person and distinct from *hoi polloi* (34e–35a). Furthermore, it would be impious, since attempting to invoke pity might seem to be a way of urging the jurors to forswear their oath to judge according to the evidence (35b–d). Here, Socrates overtly sets himself up as morally superior to *hoi polloi*, the ordinary men who made up the jury: cowardly behavior in which *you* indulge is shameful for a distinguished man like *me*. He establishes a separate standard of dignified behavior for himself (and other virtuous men) that is far removed from the democratic notion of citizen dignity as protection against verbal or physical insult by the powerful.

Democratic dignity was a collective possession of the demos, guaranteed by the collective political will (expressed especially in judicial decisions) of the people. It is the will of the many exercised in defense of the honor of the individual citizen who might be incapable of holding his own against a stronger and hubristic man.³⁹ Socratic dignity by contrast is adherence to a personal standard of virtue: the self-willed determination of the one good man to avoid shaming himself and, by extension, his polis by refusing to “stage these pathetic dramas” (35b). Moreover, Socrates denies the central, if unofficial, role of the court as an agent of social control. Socrates claims that the only legitimate approach for a juror who would not impiously forswear himself was to judge the matter at hand against a fixed standard of justice. While most jurors no doubt regarded justice as a paramount concern, they defined justice as the good of the democratic polis. That good demanded that judges take into account a

³⁸ Family tableaux and their contexts: Humphreys, “Social Relations”; T odd, “Purpose of Evidence.” Brickhouse and Smith (*Socrates on Trial*, 200–209) present a tortured argument to the effect that Socrates’ comments here might win the sympathy of some jurors.

³⁹ Citizen dignity: Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 101–4, 183–84; Fisher, *Hybris*, 36–150; Herman, “Honour, Revenge.” On the contrast between Socratic and democratic notions of autonomy, see Farrar, *Origins*, 121.

litigant's standing as a citizen. And that standing was demonstrated, in part, by his integration into a network of kin and friends.⁴⁰

When viewed through the prism of an Athenian jurymen's expectations, Socrates' speech is revealed as a real shocker, and Socrates' professed amazement at the relatively high number of positive votes (some 220, as against some 280 for conviction, 36a) seems warranted—and might be read as demonstrating that the democratic system was a good deal better than Socrates had initially supposed. It is certainly not unreasonable to guess that if Socrates had employed a more traditional rhetorical strategy (well within his powers, as his inversion of traditional tropes demonstrates), he would have been acquitted. Moreover, since he need only have influenced thirty swing votes, Socrates presumably could have avoided the death penalty had he been willing in his second speech to propose to the jurymen what they regarded as a reasonable counterpenalty. Instead, Socrates suggested as his just deserts for having impoverished himself through carrying out his critical duties that he be treated as the equivalent of an Olympic victor and be feasted for life at public expense in the Prytaneion (36d–e).⁴¹ After this arrogant refusal to treat the will of the court seriously, the off-hand offer of a thirty-*mina* fine, to be paid by Socrates' wealthy friends (including Plato), was unlikely to persuade many on the jury.⁴² The final vote in favor of the prosecution was the likely consequence of Socrates' overt unwillingness to accept the authority of democratic speech acts by regarding the verdict of the *dikastai* as having constituted him a guilty man. In general, Socrates' second speech and final address strengthen the impression of his first speech: the philosopher's understanding of the public good, justice, and dignity was fundamentally at odds with Athenian popular ideology.

The *Apology* is a demonstration of an alternative and openly critical use of the ordinarily democratic genre of dicanic rhetoric. Plato's Socrates employs speech not to demonstrate conformity with and submission to a democratic

⁴⁰ Social control in Athens and the role of kinship and friendship groups in maintaining it: Humphreys, "Social Relations"; Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Law, Violence*; Hunter, *Policing*. Cf. above, 3.n.32.

⁴¹ Schmitt Pantel, *Cité*, 145–49, reviews the tradition of lifelong *sitēsis* in the *prytaneion*, with special reference to Socrates' proposal, pointing out the rarity of the honor in the democratic polis and its archaic, aristocratic, and religious associations. Socrates' proposal should be viewed especially in the context of the Greek tradition that saw the Olympic victor as worthy of public honors not only because of his past success, but also because he could be called upon in the future to serve the state. He might, for example, be asked to aid the polis by his special (touched by the grace of the gods) presence in the especially dangerous front rank of the phalanx. On this and other complex social negotiations that reintegrated the victor into the public domain of the polis, see Kurke, "Economy of *Kudos*."

⁴² Brickhouse and Smith (*Socrates on Trial*, 225–30) attempt to show that the fine was a sincere offer that might have convinced some jurymen to accept his proposal. They are right to point out that thirty *minai* is not a paltry sum, but the *manner* in which the offer was made was bound to be irritating: Socrates makes it clear that *he* will not be paying the fine; rather, the sum will be put up by his wealthy and aristocratic friends, at least one of whom (Plato) was a relative of members of the Thirty.

ethos that emphasized equality among citizens and their collective wisdom, but as a form of provocation and cultural criticism:

Perhaps you think, Athenians, that I have been convicted for lack of words (*aporia logōn*) to persuade you, that I thought it right to do and say anything to be acquitted. Not so. It is true I have been convicted for a lack; not a lack of words, but, lack of bold shamelessness, unwillingness to say the things that you would find it most pleasant (*hēdistā*) to hear—lamenting and wailing, saying and doing many things I claim to be unworthy of me, but things of the sort you are accustomed to hear from others. I did not then think it necessary to do anything unworthy of a free man (*aneleutheron*) because of danger; I do not now regret so having conducted my defense; and I would far rather die with that defense than live with the other. (38d–e)

Socrates follows this overt rejection of conformity with a prophecy: The Athenians are killing him in a vain attempt to free themselves from his stubborn insistence that they examine their own standards and beliefs, but following Socrates' death they will be pursued by younger, fiercer, more numerous critics. Thus the Athenians' proper and prudential response to Socratic criticism is not to kill the one gentle critic they now have, but to take proper care to make themselves as good as possible (39c–d). That is, each Athenian must abandon his illogical, ideological, democratic convictions and seek, preferably with expert elenctic assistance, to find better, more logically consistent alternatives.

This section, and the text as a whole, make it clear that Socrates saw his own criticism of the status quo, both before and during the trial, as meliorative and as his duty to god, self, and polis. Socrates believed himself assigned to the polis of his birth as a beneficial gadfly, and the speech in his "defense" can be regarded as his last, best sting. Socrates, as depicted in Plato's *Apology*, never sought out a mass audience, but he clearly chose to use the nonvoluntary occasion of his own trial in a final attempt to educate and so improve his fellow citizens. Although Socrates doubted his own ability to persuade his judges to acquit him in a short speech, unless we imagine that Socrates was willfully wasting everyone's time, we must suppose that when addressing the jury (rather than keeping a dignified silence), he kept open the possibility that he would succeed in educating some or all of them. His use of the trial as an educational occasion is in line with his self-description as a good citizen and public benefactor. A Socrates convinced of demotic ineducability, and concerned only with his own soul or the moral improvement of a few intimates, would have nothing to say at a public trial.⁴³

If the *Apology* represents Socrates' ultimate challenge to the lazy horse of the Athenian polis, it was also, especially when read in conjunction with the *Crito*, a challenge to his would-be followers. Those who claimed to be truly influenced by Socrates' speech and actions were enjoined by Socrates' "oracular"

⁴³ That Socrates would elect not to speak in his own defense is contemplated in the *Gorgias*; see below, 4.C.4. On Socrates as a "public educator," contrast Nehamas, *Art of Living*, ch. 6.

prophecy to become the younger, fiercer gadflies he foresaw as his successors. Just as Delphic Apollo had ordered Socrates to interrogate his fellows, Socrates now seemingly orders all self-styled Socratics to continue his mission by similar means. And their probable fate was also predicted by the master: if the *Apology* identifies the stubborn convictions of the masses as the appropriate target for the Socratic critic, so, too, it identifies that same common ideology as the critic's probable murderer; it had killed many good men before, "nor will it be surprising if it fails to stop with me" (28b).

B.2. *Not Doing Harm*: Crito

The *Apology* presents Socrates as a patriotic citizen who attempted to improve his fellows through meliorative provocation and criticism of popular ideology. Socrates avoided addressing the Assembly, but he carried out his critical obligations in public places (above, 4.n.37) as well as in private houses. The trial speech itself represents an apparently sincere attempt to employ public rhetoric for the purposes of mass education. Socrates' speech also projected the likely outcome of openly engaging in social criticism: the death of the dissenter at the hands of those he attempted to improve. The *Crito* reiterates, but in the form of dialogic reasoning, the central themes that democratic knowledge was tantamount to ignorance, that it was a philosopher-citizen's duty to criticize ignorance, and that fatal consequences could attend the public practice of dissent. And the elenctic logic of the *Crito* takes the argument an important step further. In the *Apology*, Socrates emphasized his refusal to harm the innocent (Leon of Salamis and the Arginusae generals); in the *Crito*, he refuses to harm even those guilty of willfully seeking to harm him.⁴⁴ Moreover, suffering the legal consequences of popular ire was not merely Socrates' idiosyncratic choice (based on his own conception of his personal dignity and his special relationship to the divinity); accepting unjust but legally mandated punishment is an ethical requirement that could be demonstrated by argument. The *Crito* is especially interesting from the point of view of speech and deed, in that there is no option of exploring the issue in greater detail "some other day." In this most private of conversations held in the building called by the Athenians simply "the public place" (prison = *to dēmosion*), we encounter Socrates at a moment when, like an Athenian Assemblyman or juror, he must make a politically relevant and binding decision with profound implications for himself and his polis, even if his knowledge is not truly adequate.⁴⁵

The *Crito* opens with an elaboration of the "expert" argument that Socrates had used to demonstrate that Meletus had no concern for the education of the young. Crito has urged Socrates to escape from prison, on the grounds that (inter alia) if Socrates were executed, "*hoi polloi*, who don't really know you or

⁴⁴ This distinction is fully developed by Kateb, "Socratic Integrity."

⁴⁵ Greek edition with notes: Burnet, *Plato's*; translation: Allen, *Dialogues*, 107–29. The most important single secondary work on the *Crito* remains Kraut, *Socrates*, to which I am deeply indebted, despite the various disagreements detailed below.

me, will think" (44b) that Crito had failed in his duty to save Socrates, given that saving him was within his power. In response to Socrates' initial comment that surely "we" should not be concerned with what *hoi polloi* think of us, and that "reasonable men" (*hoi epieikestatoi*)—the only ones worth considering—would understand the course of events (44c), Crito replies that the outcome of the trial had made all too clear "how necessary it really is to care about what *hoi polloi* think," since they can accomplish (i.e., through felicitous speech acts) nearly the greatest of evils (i.e., perlocutionary effects) when a man has been slandered among them (44d). Crito's position is then subjected to the analogical argument for technical expertise (just as in the case of physical training, he who hopes for improvement and for the avoidance of corruption must attend to the knowledgeable few and ignore the advice of the ignorant many) and thereby demolished (46b–48b). Socrates concludes with the scornful comment that the considerations Crito has raised (Socrates' supporters' financial loss, the fate of Socrates' own children, what people think) "are really fit topics for people who kill lightly and would raise to life again without a thought if they could—the very multitude (*toutōn tōn pollōn*)."⁴⁶ In contrast, for "us," the choice of how to act is determined by justice, and justice is to be discovered only through logical argument (48c–d).

Yet Socrates has acknowledged that there could be a prudential concern involved: "*hoi polloi* can kill us" (48b), and in order to decide the ethical response to that clear and present danger, it was necessary to do some further investigation in order to discover whether it might be possible justly to avoid death by flight. Socrates first establishes the remarkable premise that, contrary to popular belief, it is never right to commit injustice (*adikein*) / do harm (*kakōn poiein*), even in response to injury (49a–50a).⁴⁶ He then sets out to show, by an imaginary conversation with the reified Laws (*nomoi*) of Athens, that a fortiori it is wrong to harm one's own polis that had done one not harm but good, and that his own escape from prison would in fact constitute an injury to Athens. The speech of the Laws combines elenchus (with Socrates as the respondent) and rhetoric, and so directly recalls the form of the *Apology*.

The Laws initially posit that escape constitutes injury because it means breaking the law, and the polis cannot continue to exist if the laws are without force (50a–b). Socrates asks Crito how we are to answer that claim, and points out that "a good deal might be said, especially by a *rhētōr*, on behalf of that law (*nomos*), now to be broken [by the proposed escape], which requires judgments judicially rendered (*dikai*) to be authoritative (*kuriai*)" (50b). The mention of the *rhētōr* is an interesting and, on the face of it, unnecessary aside. It signals that while Socrates and democratic ideology both believe that laws and judg-

⁴⁶ Injustice and harm are expressly equated in this dialogue. Although in the *Gorgias* (488c–89a) Socrates asserts, and Callicles agrees, that *hoi polloi* do believe that it is worse to do injustice than to suffer injustice (*aischion to adikein tou adikeisthai*), this is a weaker formulation than the one asserted by Socrates in the *Crito*. The originality of this conception: Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist*, 197–99. Kraut (*Socrates*, 11–12) argues that Socrates' position is consistent from the *Apology* to *Crito*; contrast Kateb, "Socratic Integrity."

ments must be authoritative, they approach the matter rather differently.⁴⁷ What, then, might a *rhētōr* have said in favor of the democratic approach? In his speech 21, *Against Meidias*, written in 346 B.C., Demosthenes presents a detailed brief for why the laws must remain authoritative if the dignity of ordinary citizens is to be protected from attacks by powerful, wealthy, clever men. Demosthenes assumes that the powerful will always desire to demonstrate their power by harming and shaming the weak, and he does not consider the possibility that they would be restrained by any internal concern for abstract justice. Nor are the laws themselves, mere inscribed letters, capable of guaranteeing compliance. Rather, the appropriate insurance of legal authority is the collective actions of the citizenry (the legal judgment and its consequences), especially when gathered as jurors. Vigorous public punishment of outrageous behavior will serve to intimidate the powerful and will force them into compliance with the will of the many. It is thus the mass of citizens, acting as jurors on the initiative of a voluntary prosecutor, that is the collective agent that ensures the authority of law. It is only when the people are unwilling to use their collective power to restrain the powerful that the law will lose its authority.⁴⁸ Although Demosthenes was not yet born in 399 B.C., Socrates is seemingly pointing to this sort of rhetorical claim in his reference to the many things that a *rhētōr* might say about the authority of law and judgment.

Socrates' position on the basis of legal authority is radically different from Demosthenes' in that it predicates the survival of legal authority on an individual's private decision to behave ethically, rather than on the public exertion of power by the people acting as a collectivity. Thus, maintaining the rule of law is an issue of ethics, not power, and it depends upon the behavior of the individual, not upon that of the collectivity. The basis of the Socratic legal order is a just contract between the Laws and the individual citizen. According to the terms of that contract, Socrates had agreed to abide by the procedural forms of Athenian law and to obey the judgments rendered by the polis (in the form of the decisions of jurors who abide by the procedural rules), even though those judgments might be substantively incorrect and so do him material harm. His

⁴⁷ Recent work on the *Crito* has tended to focus on the no-harm doctrine (which we must suppose was established in an unreported conversation) as dialectically adequate, once fleeing has been shown to constitute an injury, to decide the issue of "flee or stay." According to Socrates' established principles, only reasoned argument should be relevant to his own decisions; the rhetorical speech of the Laws thus becomes Socrates' attempt to persuade Crito (who evidently needs this sort of rhetorical crutch) rather than the basis of Socrates' own reasoning; see Miller, "Arguments"; White, "Plato's *Crito*." But the problem remains that Socrates asserts (54d) that it is "these things" (the Laws' speech) that makes Socrates himself incapable of hearing counter-arguments (see below, 4.B.3), and so I remain skeptical about directly correlating the speech Socrates creates for the Laws with what might be said on behalf of the law by "a *rhētōr*." I am indebted to a forthcoming paper by Melissa Lane, "Argument and Agreement in Plato's *Crito*," for elucidation of reason and rhetoric in the *Crito*.

⁴⁸ Demosthenes 21: MacDowell, *Demosthenes, Against Meidias* (Greek edition with commentary); Erbse, "Midiana"; Wilson, "Demosthenes 21"; Harris, "Demosthenes' Speech"; Ober *Athenian Revolution*, 86–106. Punishment as a form of social control: Allen, "Situation of Punishment."

obedience was given in exchange for having received from the Laws specific goods: his birth (because of the laws regarding marriage), his nurture (*trophē*), and his education (*paideia*). Moreover, the Laws claim that because Socrates is the “son and slave” of the Laws, the parties to the contract are not on an equal footing:

We bore you, reared you, educated you (*egenou te kai exetraphēs kai epaideuthēs*). Can you then say, first of all, that you are not our offspring and our slave—you and your ancestors before you? And if that’s true, do you think that justice is on an equal basis between you and us—that it is right for you to do in return what we may undertake to do to you?⁴⁹ (50e)

Socrates, of course, cannot do *anything* substantively harmful to *any* entity by his own lights. Here the Laws demonstrate that for any citizen to break the law is manifestly to do harm to an entity that deserves special respect and gratitude, and so harming the Laws (even in response to an injury) is seen to be unjust, even from the perspective of a traditional Greek help-friends/harm-enemies ethics.⁵⁰ And thus, by escaping, the man who (in the *Apology*) had publicly announced his relative moral superiority would sink beneath the ethical standard demanded of *hoi polloi*. The Laws reiterate the analogy between Laws and citizen, and parent and child, which results in the claim that the fatherland (*patris*) must be revered and obeyed even more than one’s own parents. And so, “The just lies here: never to give way, never to desert, never to leave your post, but in war and in court of law and everywhere else to do what polis and *patris* command—that or persuade it of what is by nature just” (51b–c). The Laws then return to the refrain: “We gave you birth. We nurtured you. We educated you. We gave you and all other citizens (*politai*) a share of every good thing we could” (51c–d). They point out that Socrates might have opted out of the contract at any time prior to his indictment by leaving the polis. But the citizen who chooses to remain in the city, and so acknowledges that he understands and accepts the way in which the Laws govern and judge, enters into a valid agreement to do as the Laws bid him. He who is unable to persuade the Laws of the rightness of his own view of justice and yet still refuses to obey them is trebly unjust: He harms that which gave him birth; he harms that which nurtured him; and he breaks the contract (51e–52a).⁵¹

⁴⁹ A strikingly similar claim was made by the prosecutor Lycurgus (in a speech of 330 B.C.): the defendant, Leocrates, who had left Athens after the battle of Chaeronea, “failed to pay back to the *patris* the price of his nurture (*apedōke ta tropheia*)” (Lycurg. 1.53); cf. below, 7.C. Kraut, *Socrates*, 91–114, esp. 105–8), who argues (passim) against the idea that the political philosophy developed in the *Crito* is authoritarian, is bothered by the argument for inequality of standing—which may seem more typical of the dialectical ground rules established by the Athenians at Melos (above, 2.E) than of standard Socratic dialectic. Cf. below, 4.n.56.

⁵⁰ On traditional Greek “harm-enemies/help-friends” ethics: Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, 180–84; Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist*, 179–90; Blundell, *Helping Friends*.

⁵¹ The force of the Laws’ argument is clarified by considering fourth-century Athenian lawmaking (*nomothesia*) procedure, on which see Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, 168–69, esp. his step no. 4: “A proposal to change the existing laws must be published before the Monument to the Epony-

The demonstration that it is unjust for *any* citizen to disobey legal judgments that were procedurally correct *whether or not they are substantially correct* is now complete, but the Laws go on to make an a fortiori argument regarding Socrates himself, which slides into an overtly rhetorical appeal.⁵² Socrates, say the Laws, affirmed the contract more than anyone else, since he left the polis less than anyone, and thus he should feel particular shame (*aischunē*) in breaking it. He did not even desire to gain knowledge of other poleis and their laws (52b), although (paradoxically) he often asserted that Sparta and Crete were well governed (52e). Moreover, Socrates will be an object of mockery (*katagelastos*) if he escapes (53a), and the whole “Socrates affair” will “appear utterly indecent” (53c). He will degrade himself by sneaking out of town dressed like a runaway slave and will live a slavish existence in foreign parts, where he will amuse his audiences with the absurd tale of his clandestine flight in peasant costume. Furthermore, if he ever offends his new hosts, Socrates can expect to “hear many a contemptuous thing said of you” (53d –e). If he brings his children with him, they will be raised and educated as non-Athenians (54a). The Laws’ peroration returns to the nurture theme: “Be persuaded by us, for we nurtured you” (54b). They assure him that if he obeys, Socrates will die the victim of injustice at the hands of fallible men (i.e., the jurors who were misled into defining Socrates’ behavior as constituting impiety), not at the hands of the law (which prescribed only the procedure for prosecution of impiety, not its definition), and they threaten him with posthumous punishment by their “brothers—the Laws in the Place of the Dead,” if he disobeys (54b –c). The dialogue concludes with Socrates’ statement that

I seem to hear these things as the Corybants seem to hear the pipes, and the droning murmur of the words sounds within me and makes me incapable of hearing anything else. Be assured that if you speak against the things that now seem to me to be so (*ta nun emoi dokounta*), you will speak in vain. Still, if you suppose you can accomplish anything, please do speak. (54d)

Not surprisingly, Crito has no reply, and so the Laws carry the day.

mous Heroes in the Agora, to enable any citizen who wishes to have a say in the matter” (168). Socrates would have ample opportunity to argue, in public and privately, against the passage of any proposed law that would make the polis an unacceptable home for him (because it would require him to choose between doing wrong and disobeying the law; cf. above, 4.n.32). If such a law were ultimately passed, he might, under Athenian law, challenge it by charging its proposer with “establishing an unsuitable law” (see Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, 175). Failing that, he was free to leave and could be across the border in a few hours. On the contractual basis of Socrates’ obedience, cf. Kraut, *Socrates*, 52–53.

⁵² Grote (*Plato*, 1: 302–4) discussed the Laws’ speech, describing it as “a piece of rhetoric imbued with the most genuine spirit of constitutional democracy. . . . Socrates is made to express the feelings and repeat the language of a genuine democratical patriot.” This is cited with approval by Vlastos (“Historical Socrates,” 90). But elsewhere Vlastos (“Political Obedience,” in *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, 32) regrets the rhetorical “hyperbole” of the Laws’ speech and tries to show (ibid., 30–42) that it cannot mean quite what it seems to, since “the thought [is] blown about by gusts of feeling” (ibid., 32). Kraut (*Socrates*, 6–7, 121) attempts (erroneously in my view) to minimize the speech’s emotionalism and appeal to public opinion.

B.3. A Socratic Code of Ethical Criticism

The *Apology* and *Crito*, taken together, may be read as establishing an “ethics of social criticism.” The Socratic code reflects Socrates’ own way of life, which had been lived according to unrefuted principles established in uncoerced conversation. These principles were hypothetical, pending further and better discussion, but the Socratic would be expected to follow them unless and until he refuted them by logical argument. As we have seen, Socrates’ life was spent in attempting to improve himself and his fellows by elenctic conversations held in public and private places. Socrates attempts to do good for his fellows—educated elites and ordinary persons alike—because he believes that he has both a duty and a capacity to do so. His *duty* is implied both by his interpretation of the Delphic oracle’s comment regarding his unsurpassed wisdom as having the illocutionary force of an order, and by the contractual argument of the Laws in the *Crito*.⁵³ Though Socrates’ duty is not put in terms of a traditional *charis* obligation (i.e., the duty to return favors for favors received), that is what every Athenian reader would recognize the *nomoi* of the *Crito* (understood as customs and formal laws) as driving at. The establishment of a duty to seek to do good (as well as to avoid doing harm) is the deafening “music” that Socrates hears as he listens avidly to the a fortiori and rhetorical arguments of the Laws, long after the establishment of the no-harm doctrine has made his choice clear. Socrates’ *capacity* to do good for his fellows is implied by the extended gadfly metaphor. He imagines that his elenctic sting really can awaken at least some Athenians, and he refuses to suppose that a priori any of his fellows is ineducable. His conviction of his duty and his capacity to improve others is why Socrates of the *Apology* chose to defend himself before the mass audience of Athenian jurors in 399; he would not seek such an opportunity, but neither could he, in good conscience, refuse it.

The Socratic ethical code is stern and inflexible; its political implications may be summed up as follows: As a citizen, you are obliged to revere your polis (which includes a special affection for your fellow citizens, *Apol.* 29d–30b), to spare no effort or expense in seeking to improve its residents, and never to harm it.⁵⁴ A polis, like a horse or an athlete, can only be improved by

⁵³ Socrates was enjoined by his interpretation of the oracle to begin the elenctic project, but the project (as his “younger, fiercer gadflies” comment [*Apol.* 39c–d] demonstrates) extended to all those who accepted the idea that an individual’s behavior should conform in practice to ethical principles arrived at in dialogic conversation, i.e., to all “Socratics.” Cf. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 267–71; Euben, *Tragedy of Political Theory*, 227, 249.

⁵⁴ Cf. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 198: *Apology* 29d–30b is “not so much a doctrine as an exhortation to be moral and to philosophize.” Although the expected efforts would not include advocating public policy as a *rhētōr*, they would include performing the normal duties of the ordinary citizen: e.g., service as a councilman (cf. Socrates’ service on the *boulē* in 406) and perhaps as a juror (*Apol.* 35a), and attendance at the Assembly (*Grg.* 455d–e, with discussion below, 4.C.2). “Citizen Socrates”: Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 54, 167–94, and *Plato’s Socrates*, 138–41; Wallach, “Socratic Citizenship”; Kraut (*Socrates*, 116–17) wrongly construes the term *idiōtēs* as indicating that Socrates “kept away from the Assembly.” Actually, virtually any Athenian litigant could claim to be an *idiōtēs* (i.e., one who engages in politics on a

those who possess superior knowledge, and it will be harmed by the management of the ignorant. If you are more knowledgeable (even if your knowledge is a negative recognition of your own moral ignorance) than the current rulers of the polis (in Athens: the entire citizenry), you are duty-bound to criticize them by pointing out the nature, extent, and harmfulness of their ignorance.⁵⁵ You must subject to your elenchus any and all of your fellows who prove willing to discuss serious matters with you (elite and non-elite alike). They will, however, probably choose not to reward you, but rather to punish you for criticizing their views. If they employ established laws and legal procedures, you are contractually bound to suffer the sentence, even if it is substantively unjust, because breaking the law harms the polis that nurtured you. The only foreseen exceptions are when obedience to human authority would entail impiety or doing (rather than suffering) injustice.⁵⁶

This is a pretty tough row to hoe for anyone who lacked Socrates' immense

voluntary, rather than "professional," basis), as did the famous Athenian political orator Aeschines (2.181) when defending himself against a treason charge in 343.

⁵⁵ This does not mean that the Socratic should seek to overthrow the government. Rather, it means that he should openly remonstrate with his fellow citizens (as Socrates did) and seek to improve them. His method will be individual conversations, but (per the gadfly/lazy horse metaphor and Socrates' frequent use of the second-person plural in the *Apology*) the goal is not only individual self-betterment but also a general improvement of the polis as a collectivity. The Socratic cannot legitimately limit his activity to improving his own soul or those of his fellow aristocrats; the effort must be public, and he must subject ordinary as well as elite persons to his elenchus; see Kraut, *Socrates*, 122, 200–201, 208–15 (citing *Apol.* 29d–30b, 30e–31a, 33b); Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 179, 194: Socrates "is precisely what he claims to be: a gadfly, a social critic, and a man who is convinced that he serves as the conscience of Athens." Contrast Nehamas *Art of Living*, ch. 6; Blank ("Socrates," 17–20, 24) suggests that, although Plato in the *Apology* (like Xenophon *Apology*) "is concerned to bring out Socrates' civic-mindedness," Socrates as depicted in most of Plato's and Xenophon's work is an elitist who refuses to accept pay in order to restrict his attentions to elite interlocutors. Yet as Strauss (*City*, 57) points out, the fact that no Platonic dialogue presents Socrates in extended conversation with an ordinary citizen reflects Plato's social tastes and philosophical interests; surveying the corpus will not yield a statistically valid sample of Socrates' actual interlocutors or of the locations (public or private) where his conversations took place.

⁵⁶ I.e., you must suffer whatever is mandated by the legal authority, but that authority cannot legitimately compel your obedience to a command to do something unjust: Kraut, *Socrates*, 45–48, 82–88. Impiety: above, 4.n.32; cf. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 149–53. It is the burden of Kraut, *Socrates*, that the argument of the Laws in the *Crito* allows a wide range of civic disobedience, so long as one is subsequently willing to defend one's actions in court and suffer the mandated punishment if one fails to persuade the jury of one's innocence. But the supposed "authoritarianism" of the argument of the *Crito* is considerably diminished in light of the overwhelmingly procedural emphasis of Athenian law (on which see Todd and Millett, "Law," 5–6; Todd, *Shape*, 64–73). Socrates agrees to abide by a set of relatively simple and publicly displayed procedures for dispute resolution and to forebear from committing (e.g.) impiety or *hubris*. Unlike a citizen of a modern state, by agreeing to obey the laws, Socrates does not sign on to any particular definition of these (and other) legal abstractions, because the law itself offers no such definitions; the jury will decide between conflicting definitions advanced by the plaintiffs. Moreover, in Athens, judicial precedents had no binding force, and new laws could be made only after open debate and a formal vote (above, 4.n.51); Socrates does not risk being bound by a new law or legal definition (e.g., a precedent established by a judge's opinion; cf. Scalia, *Matter of Interpretation*) that he had no opportunity to challenge.

physical and moral courage and the clearly audible inner voice that prevented him from engaging in wrongdoing. If the *Apology* represents Socrates' final attempt to educate the Athenian demos, then the *Apology* and *Crito*, read together, might be seen as his farewell wake-up sting for would-be Socratics.

Plato, however, did not closely imitate Socrates' own manner of life. He did not allow his private estate to fall into ruin in the philanthropic pursuit of the betterment of Athens, nor did he haunt public spaces intent on making himself available for engaging ordinary citizens and other polis residents in elenctic conversation. Instead, he withdrew to the Academy and apparently conversed seriously only with a few carefully chosen students, most of them noncitizens. He was not perceived as a public figure, as Socrates had been, and never had trouble with Athenian law. By choosing the quietist path, detailed in the *Seventh Letter*, and avoiding the opportunities for elenctic conversation in public places that had typified the historical Socrates' life, Plato seemingly disobeyed certain political aspects of Socrates' ethical code as sketched out in the *Apology* and *Crito*. Assuming that Plato remained true to the injunction to accept the practical implications of unrefuted philosophical arguments, we might therefore hypothesize that he found a way to refute, or at least to reinterpret, parts of Socrates' ethics of criticism. This will mean that Plato found a different way of being a critic of popular rule.⁵⁷ The *Crito* itself, especially when read in the context of fourth-century Athens, offers some purchase for a critical approach to the conclusions Plato's Socrates reaches in that dialogue.

First, Socrates of the *Crito* claims that a citizen must always ignore the opinion of the many but must always obey the laws. Logically, therefore, the law must be something different from the opinion of the many. The distinction between law and opinion could be maintained with reasonable conviction by many people in many poleis (e.g., in Sparta by those who believed the story of Lycurgus the Lawgiver), but to assert the complete independence of the law from popular opinion in early fourth-century Athens was chimerical.⁵⁸ By 399, officials appointed by the democratic polis had recently completed some ten years of collecting and scrutinizing the laws (cf. above, 3.C.4). By 404, most of the preliminary work had been done, but then came the bloody reign of the

⁵⁷ Contrast Strauss, *City*, 51, on Socrates' "way of life" as a model suited to imitation. On Plato's self-conscious turning away from public life and politics generally, see above, 4.A.2, with Carter, *Quiet Athenian*, 173–82; Farrar, *Origins*, 265–74; Barber, *Conquest*, 205 (linking Plato with Kant and Hegel as exemplars of the "radical philosophical [i.e., foundational, antipolitical] tradition"). Lynch, *Aristotle's School*, 58–59, cites the ancient tradition that Plato's Academy was "more political" (*politikōteron*) than even the Pythagoreans (Anon. *Vita Platonis* 61 [p. 387 Westermann]); but Brunt, "Plato's Academy," firmly rejects the notion (defended by, e.g., Field, *Plato and His Contemporaries*, 43–45; Friedländer, *Plato*, 88–89, 100–107) that Plato intended the Academy to teach men of affairs how to institute good regimes. "Citizen Plato" reemerges briefly later in the *Seventh Letter* (333d: *Athēnaios anēr egō*; 350a: it is oarsmen "from Athens and so fellow citizens of mine" [*emoi politai*] who warn him of his dangerous unpopularity with the Sicilian mercenary peltasts and thereby save his life).

⁵⁸ Brickhouse and Smith (*Socrates on Trial*, 151) attempt to claim that Athenian law is divinely ordained. This is quite misleading; cf. Todd, *Shape*, 49–63, esp. 63.

Thirty. Soon after the restoration of the democracy, the Athenian Assembly passed a decree, moved by Teisamenos, to the effect that the collected laws should be reviewed and supplemented by large, democratically appointed boards of *nomothetai*. When the boards' work was done, the Assembly voted to ratify these laws, and decreed that all other laws passed before 403 were annulled. A regular procedure was established whereby the Assembly voted annually on whether the laws should be further revised; if the vote was positive, a new board of *nomothetai* was named. There has been much scholarly debate over the question of whether these changes should be regarded as a "conservative" break with prior "radical" democratic practice—but wherever one stands on the "rule of law" question, it is certain that the late-fifth-/early-fourth-century legal reforms forthrightly asserted the human origin of Athenian law and the power of democratic bodies of ordinary citizens (whether *ekklēsiastai* or *nomothetai*) to make, ratify, and eliminate laws on the basis of the ordinary democratic procedures of public debate. Thus the Laws of Athens that spoke to Socrates had very recently been inscribed on the orders of the Assembly, had been ratified by the Assembly, and could be changed if and when the Assembly found them to be in error. When making and ratifying laws, the Assemblymen and the *nomothetai* appointed by the Assembly based their decisions on democratic knowledge, that is, popular opinion. How, then, could Socrates possibly build a code of ethical behavior, applicable to himself and other Athenians, on the basis of a fundamental distinction between the opinion of the many and the law?⁵⁹

Next, the Laws themselves seem to reveal their origins in fallible public opinion when making their rhetorical plea to Socrates. Unlike Socrates when he is speaking in his own person, the Laws are very concerned with appearance: the shame of being mocked, the appearance of slavishness, the indignity of dressing like a lowly peasant. They expect Socrates to recoil in horror at the idea of his children being raised as foreigners. Yet Socrates himself had previ-

⁵⁹ Athenian lawmaking procedures: above, 4.n.51. Colson ("On Appealing to Athenian Law") claims that the Laws are purified versions of Athenian laws, rather than the actual laws of the democracy. Likewise, Kraut (*Socrates*, 66, 77–82) deals with the issue of the relationship of the Laws to Athenian legal institutions by claiming that the Laws of the *Crito* were "ideal observers of the Athenian legal scene, equipped with a philosophy of law which no Athenian, other than Socrates, need ever have held"; they were a mix of Athenian institutions and Socratic philosophy, a sort of "jurisprudence." And so the "standards and perceptions" of the Laws need not necessarily be those of the Athenians. This is, I think, an error. It is *hoi nomoi kai to koinon tēs poleōs* that speak to Socrates (50a), and the Laws are distinctly Athenian laws (52b, 53a), in contrast to laws of other poleis. As noted above (4.n.56), Athenian law was overwhelmingly procedural and left the definition of important terms (e.g., *asebeia*, *hubris*) up to the litigants and jurors. Thus I suppose that Socrates did accept as legitimate the basic procedures by which he is judged, including the authority of popular courts. But he regards it as possible (indeed, likely) that the particular jury will decide substantively wrongly, having employed erroneous definitions in its judgments. The decision of a given jury is not equivalent to the Laws themselves and could be unjust (54c). See also Brickhouse and Smith, *Plato's Socrates*, 151. The problem is that much worse if by *nomoi* we are to understand generally Athens' "customs" rather than (or as well as) formal laws, since custom and opinion are very difficult to distinguish.

ously specifically denied that considerations of children and appearance were of concern to men like himself and asserted that such considerations were suited only to the ignorant multitude.⁶⁰ The Laws are, moreover, oddly willing to claim both that Socrates had no desire to learn about the laws of foreign places, and that he frequently used to say that Sparta and Crete were well governed.⁶¹ Evidently they accuse Socrates of speaking with assurance of things regarding which he had no care to gather accurate knowledge—a grave accusation in Socratic terms (cf. Socrates’ attack on Meletus in the *Apology*). Was this not just the sort of slander to which (according to Socrates of the *Apology*) popular opinion gives rise? Finally, as Melissa Lane points out, the Laws distinguish *ergon* from *logos*, stressing that Socrates’ agreement was made “by *ergon* not (*alla ou*) by *logos*” (52d). The Laws seem to agree with Thucydides in prioritizing *ergon* over *logos*: Socrates’ true agreement with the Laws is for them signaled by his actions (remaining in Athens), despite any verbal complaints he may have registered. Yet Socrates himself, speaking in *propria persona*, had earlier reiterated his fundamental commitment to being persuaded only by the argument that seemed best to him on reflection (*logizomenōi*, 46b).⁶²

These concerns point to a need to look more carefully at the Laws’ substantive argument, which is based on equating the existing laws, the polis, and the fatherland (*patris*) through the argument that to disobey the laws is to destroy polis and *patris*. The system under which Socrates was raised was, in the argument of the Laws, ancestral (50e)—but what really was the ancestral constitution of Athens? By 399 this had been a very hot political topic for well over a decade.⁶³ Some men Socrates might consider reasonable would argue that for the polis to be a true *patris*, the new laws (ratified in 403) must be thrown out and the old (ancestral) ones reinstated. If it is possible to separate currently enforced laws and polis, one might argue that a polis could retain (or even regain) its integrity by destroying (annulling) the existing laws, and replacing them wholesale with better laws. Certainly, would be Socrates’ Laws’ reply, but only if you can *persuade* us to change.⁶⁴ But what are the real chances of

⁶⁰ Cf. Miller, “Arguments,” 128–29; White, “Plato’s *Crito*,” esp. 113–14.

⁶¹ Popper (*Spell of Plato*, 304–5 n. 53) avoided the problem by rejecting the passage as corrupt. This is surely a desperate and unnecessary expedient, as Kraut (*Socrates*, 215–23) points out.

⁶² Lane, “Argument and Agreement in Plato’s *Crito*,” noting “The tension between Socratic agreement on the basis of *logos* and contractarian agreement on the basis of *ergon*. . . . The demands of deeds do not do full justice to a life which has elected the demands of reason as its guiding force.”

⁶³ *Patrios politeia* debate: Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty*, 337–411; Strauss, *Fathers and Sons*, 181–87. Note the reference to the corruption of the ancestral standards (*ēthē*) and practices (*epitēdeumata*) in *Seventh Letter* 325d. The *patrios politeia* debate recurs in Isocrates’ *Areopagiticus* (below, 5.C), and perhaps in Aristotle’s “oldest and best” democracy (below, 6.D.2).

⁶⁴ Kraut (*Socrates*, 54–90, esp. 56–59) argues that persuade-or-obey doctrine need not necessarily mean obey until one persuades (through constitutional amendment), but could encompass attempted persuasion of a jury subsequent to an apparent act of disobedience. I think that this is right, and it is quite easily accommodated by paying attention (as Kraut sometimes does not) to the

meliorative persuasion if it is not Laws in the abstract that must be persuaded, but rather masses of ignorant, ideological lawmakers who must be convinced by the sort of public address that Socrates assiduously avoided—at least until the trial? And what of the oft-repeated litany of “we bore, nurtured, and educated you”? If these are true claims, the Laws’ contractual argument holds, and their rhetoric, however faulty, is irrelevant. But are they actually true? Did Socrates owe his birth to the laws of Athens? Was he well raised and properly nurtured by them? How did they educate him?⁶⁵ All of this goes oddly unexamined in the dialogue, and indeed, rigorous examination is impossible, not only because of the time constraint, but because Socrates cannot hear any argument that runs counter to his current beliefs due to the buzzing murmur of the Laws’ rhetoric, which bewitches him just as the flutes bewitch the Corybant.⁶⁶

The considerations raised above may lead even a very sympathetic reader to consider the possibility that the *Crito*’s Socrates himself was to some degree in thrall to a rhetoric based ultimately on popular opinion, and that his speech and actions were not, therefore, strictly based on logically defensible premises established in uncoerced conversation. If this were so, the Socratic ethics of criticism must be rethought. In any event, when reinserted in the early-fourth-century context in which it was written and first read, much of the argument of the *Apology* and *Crito* seems far from decisive. These are texts that pose for the Socratic a complex problem; their ethical code may be regarded as a preliminary stopgap, to be used as a guideline pending a much more careful examination of the duty of the just individual to his polis and to himself, and of the educational capacity of speech in the democratic polis. This examination will need to consider a number of important issues, among them the relationship between opinion, knowledge, and law; the persuasive effectiveness of rhetoric and its potential consequences—when it is deployed by the philosopher and by the *rhētōr*; the meaning of nurture and education; and the possibility that even a philosopher’s reasoning may reflect the ideological postulates of the society in which he lives. That deeper examination, which is pursued in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, entailed a similarly profound critical investigation of the roots and consequences of popular rule.⁶⁷

procedural emphasis of Athenian law; see above, 4.n.56. Socrates did not believe he had committed *asebeia*; Meletus supposed he had. It was up to the jury to decide between their conflicting definitions of pious behavior. But in the case of a general replacement of the established laws by new ones, I take it that Socrates’ convictions would require constitutional persuasion (in Assembly and through the process of *nomothesia*).

⁶⁵ Kraut (*Socrates*, 91 n. 1) raises the thorny question of whether there really was an Athenian law requiring an Athenian parent to teach his son music and gymnastics; whereas Kraut supposes such a law might have existed, there is no positive evidence for it, and the general tenor of Athenian attitudes toward education (compare *Prot.* 322d–28d; *Meno* 92e), emphasizing development of civic loyalties rather than specific skills, would seem to militate against it. See below, 4.D.4.

⁶⁶ Cf. Miller, “Arguments,” 122: it is Socrates’ own (reasoned) perspective that is drowned out.

⁶⁷ Here, I disagree with Kraut (*Socrates*), who attempts to make the philosophy enunciated in the *Crito* congruent with all the early dialogues, including the *Gorgias*.

C. IN DUBIOUS BATTLE: *GORGIAS*

Plato, as a native citizen of Athens, was enjoined by the Socratic ethics of criticism to love and revere Athens, to seek to persuade the Athenians to change for the better, and to obey all existing laws and procedurally correct judicial decisions—whether or not his attempt at beneficial persuasion succeeded. The *Gorgias*, a dialogue that focuses on rhetoric and its practitioners, can be read as an exploration of the some key difficulties involved in attempting to obey the Socratic injunction, most especially the problematic conditions bearing on the process of therapeutic persuasion in the democratic polis.⁶⁸ If the *Apology* and *Crito* are normative, in that together they set out what a Socratic philosopher should do (i.e., why he must criticize and what sort of criticism he should engage in), then the *Gorgias* establishes a central philosophical problematic in that it demonstrates why achieving this Socratic norm is impracticable given the democratic polis-as-it-is. Discursively and spatially, the indeterminate physical setting and shadowy audience of the *Gorgias* provide a transition between Socrates, the gadfly who frequents the public spaces of the *agora* and addresses the people's court because it is his duty (*Apology* and *Crito*), and Socrates the system-builder, who discourses to a select and educable company in the private home of the metic Cephalus (*Republic*).

The *Gorgias* seeks to establish that public speech in democratic Athens is not (and, barring major structural change, cannot become) what many Athenians, including elite *rhētores*, suppose it to be: a meliorative social intervention whereby a technically skilled *rhētōr*, who wishes the best for himself and his polis, devises a means of improvement and persuades a mass audience to enact a sound proposal, thereby resulting in genuinely beneficial outcomes for the polis. Rather, the reader learns that public speech caters indiscriminately to the desires of the many (thereby corrupting them) while simultaneously serving to corrupt the speaker and to enslave him to the multitude. This is because it was not actually the speaker who controlled the rhetorical process and its outcome by shaping mass opinion to conform to his own wishes; rather, the mass audience controlled the speaker, whose desire for honor and power led him first to imitate his audience and finally to become identical to the mob. Along the way, the dialogue once again exposes the reality that lies at the heart of the democracy: that in Athens, the demos really does rule. It reveals that the instrument of demotic rule is an ideological hegemony over each citizen, and especially over would-be leaders. That hegemony is not threatened by the education in the techniques of public address offered to aspiring politicians by professional rhetoricians. Indeed, demotic hegemony is strengthened by a rhetorical training that prepares ambitious men for menial service rather than for engagement in critical resistance, battle, and therapy.

⁶⁸ Greek edition and commentary: Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*; translations with notes: Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias*; Allen, *Dialogues*, 189–316.

C.I. Gorgias versus *Apology* and *Crito*

If one starts from the premise that the *Gorgias* can be approached as a commentary on the *Apology* and *Crito*, then an exploration of public rhetoric seems called for (inter alia) because the earlier dialogues had not fully explained the nature or origins of the popular prejudice that had doomed Socrates to a trial in the people's court, and so to death. Just how deep did the fatal prejudice against philosophical activity run within the demos? Might it have been defused or even reversed if Socrates had been granted more time to explain his benevolent role in the polis to his mass audience of jurors—as he hints in the *Apology* (19a, 24a)? Nor did the two earlier dialogues fully resolve the question of whether rhetoric might reasonably be used by the philosopher in the project of trying to improve one's fellows. Granted that (per Thucydides and Aristophanes) rhetoric was often employed by Athenian politicians as a means to evil ends, were bad outcomes due merely to the fact that some *rhētores* happened to be bad men? That is to say, when (ex hypothesi) the polis was made worse through rhetoric, was this simply a matter of misusing a neutral tool that could just as well be turned to good ends? Or was there something inherently wrong with the tool itself? What precisely was the relationship between the employer of rhetoric (the Athenian politician or Socratic philosopher), the consumer of rhetoric (the Athenian demos), and the condition of the polis? In short, was it reasonable to suppose that an Athenian citizen, who hoped to adhere to the Socratic injunction to criticize error and to obey the laws, might be able to effect a meaningful improvement of the democratic polis as a whole through persuasion? If the answer for Plato was no—as my reading of the dialogue suggests—then an approach quite different from the piecemeal elenctic conversations that constituted Socratic practice as described in the *Apology* would presumably be required. The *Gorgias* thus establishes the prior conditions that allow, or even require, Plato (if he is to preserve the possibility of doing positive good) to abandon what I have described as Socrates' code of criticism. In so doing, it points toward the foundationalist political, moral, and metaphysical project of the *Republic*.⁶⁹

The *Gorgias* differs from the *Apology* and *Crito*, which are firmly rooted in the year 399, in that it is cut free from chronological specificity. The dramatic setting of the dialogue is certainly democratic Athens—the place where men enjoyed the greatest “license in relationship to speech” in all Hellas (461e) — but Plato has muddled the chronology by setting up what appear to be contradictory pointers: Pericles is described as recently deceased (503c). He actually died in 429 B.C., so the dramatic date seems to be the early 420s. But Socrates also mentions that he served as *bouleutēs* last year (473e). As he pointed out in the *Apology*, Socrates was a member of the council during the trial of the

⁶⁹ For a somewhat different approach to the issue of rhetoric and the polis in the *Gorgias* and *Republic*, see Yunis, *Taming*, 117–71. Cf. Dodds, *Gorgias*, v: in the *Gorgias*, “Plato's case is not yet encumbered with all the metaphysical baggage of the *Republic*.” I agree, but I would add that the argument of the *Gorgias* makes it necessary for Plato to take on the excess baggage.

generals at Arginousai, that is, in 406 B.C., so the date seems to be 405. Unless we choose the desperate course of giving Socrates a second year on the council, or we suppose that Plato is being sloppy, the mixed chronological message must be deliberate: the scene is a generic post-Periclean democratic Athens.⁷⁰ The net effect is to foreclose the possibility of challenging Socrates' positions on the basis of close historical arguments (e.g., pointing out the problematic dissociation of laws from popular opinion in 399 B.C.). The two indications of date that Plato does provide would, however, tend to focus a contemporary reader's attention on the problems of democracy: Thucydides was surely not idiosyncratic within the critical community in seeing the death of Pericles as a watershed. The Assembly meeting over which Socrates presided in 406 B.C. (on which, see below, 4.C.2) was regarded by some critics (e.g., Xen. *Hell.* 1.7) as a key moment in the progressive degeneration of Athens into mob rule. Yet the dialogue explicitly refutes the notion that democracy had become corrupt at some specific moment or era: Socrates asserts that Pericles and the other democratic leaders of the early and middle fifth century had participated in an already corrupt regime and that each contributed to the corruption.

Socrates' stance on the use of rhetoric in this dialogue about rhetoric seems quite different from the earlier texts in which Socrates (in propria persona and through the speech of the Laws) willingly employed familiar rhetorical tropes in the attempt to persuade his audiences. In the *Apology*, Socrates addresses a spirited speech to a mass audience of jurors because he believes that doing so might improve his fellow citizens. By contrast, when Socrates of the *Gorgias* alludes to the likelihood of undergoing trial, he predicts that he will have nothing at all to say to the jury (see below, 4.C.4); even Socratic public speech is no longer regarded as potentially benefiting a mass audience of listeners. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates works hard to prevent the conversation from devolving into competitive rhetorical performances. He enforces his will by threatening to abandon the conversation altogether if his interlocutors refuse to engage in dialogue according to dialectical rules.⁷¹ The contrast with the *Apology* is pointed, since the earlier work had revolved around Socrates' principled refusal to abandon his assigned post as critical gadfly. At least when engaged in a relatively private "indoor" conversation, the Socrates of the *Gorgias* has no duty to stand his ground and can abandon the argument if he regards it as unproductive. What, then, is its potential product?

Both the *Apology* and *Crito* are overtly aimed at a particular public outcome: in each case a decision must be made that will have immediate, profound, and

⁷⁰ Cf. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 17–18; Allen, *Dialogues*, 189; Yunis, *Taming*, 118–19. Of course, one might surmise that, among nostalgic critics of democracy like Thucydides, Pericles has always "just died."

⁷¹ Resists the use of rhetoric: 447b–c, 471e. Threatens to leave the conversation if rhetoric is used: 461e–462a (Polus asks: "Is it not permitted for me to say whatever I wish?" Socrates replies that Polus would be suffering outrageous treatment if he should be deprived of that right in Athens of all places, but that he, Socrates, has an equal right to leave and not listen to Polus); 489d (Socrates threatens to break off the discussion with Callicles).

permanent consequences for Socrates and his polis. Depending on the outcome of each of Socrates' attempts at persuasion in the two earlier dialogues, Athenians will have to act in specific ways, and certain things will necessarily happen. The stakes in the *Gorgias* are much less obvious. Gorgias and Polus, the foreign-born and self-proclaimed masters of rhetoric who are Socrates' interlocutors in the first part of the dialogue, are unlikely to abandon their lucrative trade of teaching ambitious young Athenians just because Socrates has shown them that their rhetoric is incapable of improving anyone. They have no real stake in any particular state or society—they have come to Athens in search of fame and profit for themselves, not because they hope to make the Athenians better. Unlike Socrates, who never left his native polis if he could help it and who owed a contractual duty to Athens (as explained by the Laws in the *Crito*), Gorgias and Polus can easily abandon Athens if the city becomes too corrupt for their taste or if their security is threatened. Unlike Socrates, they will never be called upon to put an unlawful measure to the vote in the Athenian Assembly; they will not have to defend their lives in an Athenian courtroom. Nor, again unlike Socrates, are they likely to be directly affected by the perlocutionary effects of their students' speech in those public fora.

The issue *should* be different with the Athenian citizen and aspiring politician Callicles, who is Socrates' interlocutor in the latter part of the dialogue. If he cares deeply for his soul and his polis, Callicles should be equally deeply concerned about the effect of rhetoric upon them. But Callicles will not revise his planned career trajectory on the basis of Socrates' elenctic destruction of his belief in tyrannical happiness, and it seems altogether unlikely that he will be coming back for the extended course that Socrates says a true change would require (513d). Thus, elenctic refutation does not have the effective power to deflect the passion of Socrates' fellow citizen from the unwholesome object of his desire: the approval of the demos. The *Gorgias* demonstrates for Plato's reader the logical and moral distinction between philosophy and rhetoric, but it also demonstrates the lack of perlocutionary effects attendant upon philosophizing in the democratic city. If philosophical speech is actually going to act (as, for better or worse, rhetorical speech certainly does), it will have to find a different context: once again, the *Gorgias* points to the *Republic*.

C.2. Citizen Socrates

The opening scene of the dialogue sets the stage (447a): Socrates and his companion Chaerephon meet up with Callicles, who ironically greets them with the comment, “*This*, they say, is how to participate in warfare and battle (*polemou kai machēs*)” —that is, they have arrived too late to experience Gorgias' rhetorical performance. Deflecting Callicles' potentially insulting witticism by commenting that what they just missed was no doubt better described as a “feast” (*hēortē*)—a redescription Callicles eagerly endorses—Socrates explains the actual cause (*aitios*) of his tardiness: Chaerephon has required (*anankasas*) him to tarry in the *agora*. This bit of stage business is far from casual, and it links the

Gorgias directly to the two earlier dialogues: Since Chaerephon is the very man whose inquiry at Delphi has saddled Socrates with his responsibility to expose others' ignorance, the reader is surely to suppose that undertaking his critical duty is just what Socrates has been up to in the *agora*.⁷² Socrates is thus initially identified as the critical citizen, duty-bound to improve his fellows, who has been carrying out his mission openly in the public square. That is to say, he is presented as living his life by the code of criticism enjoined by the earlier dialogues. Callicles informs him that Gorgias is taking questions "inside" so that Socrates can still catch a part of the performance. Socrates is more interested in questioning than eloquent display anyway, and the three men enter the unnamed building where the rest of the dialogue takes place.⁷³

Socrates quickly gets down to an investigation of what a *rhētōr* and his craft really are. It soon transpires that Socrates knows a good deal more about rhetoric in the real world than do his first two interlocutors, the foreigners Gorgias and Polus. In several passages, Socrates paraphrases the technical language of the Assembly and courts, demonstrating an easy familiarity with the discourse appropriate to those institutions.⁷⁴ Moreover, citizen Socrates reveals that he has sat in the Assembly and has witnessed the effects of rhetoric firsthand. When Gorgias cites the public advice of Themistocles and Pericles to build walls and dockyards as examples of the power (*dunamis*) of rhetoric, Socrates replies, "That is what is said about Themistocles, and I myself heard Pericles when he advised us (*hēmin*) about the Middle Wall" (455d –e, cf. 503a–d). The subject just happens to be walls and Pericles, but Socrates can speak from personal experience; surely this is not mere happenstance. The reader is left with the impression that Socrates' practical experience of Athenian public life is profound; Socrates' decision not to *address* the Assembly and his "clumsiness" in putting the vote as *prutanis* (see below, this section) should not mislead Plato's readers into assuming that Socrates avoided attending the Assembly—any more than he avoided the public spaces of the *agora*. Socrates not only outreasons his interlocutors in this dialogue—he

⁷² *Grg.* 447a7–8: *aitios Chairephōn hode, en agorai anankasas hēmas diatripsai*: Chaerephon is the cause (*aitios*) of the necessity of Socrates' busying himself or wasting time—*diatripsai* can be translated either way. The ambiguity may be significant. On my reading, by the end of the dialogue it turns out that Socrates may indeed have been wasting his time in public criticism; the tension concerning whether he does right by engaging in his critical enterprise is exactly what the dialogue is about. Socrates may be taken as implying that Chaerephon is either the proximate or the ultimate cause of his spending time in the *agora*—the term *aitios* recalls Thucydides' distinction between the apparent cause (*aitia*) and the underlying cause (*prophasis*) of great events. Yunis, *Taming*, argues for a strong intertextual relationship between Plato's *Gorgias* and Thucydides; see below, 4.n.97.

⁷³ Evidence for the location of the dialogue: Dodds (*Plato: Gorgias*, 188) argues against the scholiast and others who have supposed that the scene is Callicles' house, suggesting rather that it begins (Socrates meets Callicles) outside a gymnasium or some other public place where Gorgias has given a demonstration of his eloquence and that it continues inside (*endon*) the public place. There is indeed no textual warrant for assuming the location is Callicles' house, but nor is there reason to suppose that the place is public rather than private—the *endon* certainly marks a distinction between the overtly public space where Socrates first meets Callicles and the "inside" where the dialogue takes place.

⁷⁴ E.g., 451b–c, 489d, 495d, 500a. Cf. *Apol.* 35a; below, 4.n.115.

demonstrates that he has a greater stake in the effects of public speech (“he advised *us*”) than they do and a superior practical knowledge of how democratic institutions really operate. When Socrates criticizes democracy, he does not do so out of ignorance or indirect knowledge.

The discussion with Gorgias and Polus establishes several important premises. First, Gorgias supposes that rhetoric’s proper environment is the public meeting and that its object is the persuasion of mass audiences. Rhetoric is aimed at “*dikastai* in the courtroom, *bouleutai* in the council, *ekklēsiastai* in the Assembly and all other public gatherings” (452e); it is useful “in courtrooms and other mob scenes (*ochlois*)” (454b), or “in a crowd (*plēthei*)” (456c). In short, per Socrates’ blunt gloss: “among the ignorant.” Gorgias admits that rhetoric is a competitive skill (*agōnia*, 456d, 457b) whose ostensible goal was not only the public good, but also rule over others (452d). Although Gorgias specifies that it should not be used against friends or kin (456d), he supposes that rhetoric’s power was such that it allowed the man who was able to speak well and to persuade the masses (*plēthē*) to enslave other experts and make them work for himself (452e). This is strong talk, and Socrates readily allows that there is no evil so great for a man as false opinion (*doxa*) on the subject of rhetoric and its uses (458a).⁷⁵

What, then, is the nature of this awesome power that is gained by addressing the masses? Socrates quickly demonstrates that because it is aimed at persuading a mob (*ochlos*, 455a) in a short time, rhetoric must be based on belief (*pistis*) rather than on verifiable knowledge (*epistēmē*), and unlike knowledge, which was necessarily true, belief might be either true or false (454d–455a). Moreover, rhetoric is not properly a technical skill (*technē*), like medicine, which consistently produces some actual good, but a mere knack gained through experience (*empeiria*) and part of the same flattery-based practice as pastry-cooking—at this point Socrates’ initial redescription of Gorgias’ performance from “war and battle” to “feast” begins to have some critical bite. Both rhetoric and gourmet cookery were aimed only at producing *charis* and pleasure (*hēdonē*: 462b–463b). Rhetoric was thus just a subset (*morion*) of flattery, an “insubstantial image (*eidōlon*) of a part of politics” (463b –d), which is in turn defined as the *technē* concerned with the improvement of the soul (464b). Moreover, rhetoric is shameful (*aischron*) because it is evil (463d). It is concerned with seeming, which Gorgias agrees is very different from actual being (464a). As an *empeiria*, rhetoric is irrational in that it is unable to give a reasoned account of its own procedures (465a).

This thoroughgoing indictment of rhetoric is, we must keep in mind, only damning in Plato’s terms; most Athenians would probably not have been much bothered by the definition of rhetoric as an *empeiria*. They would have agreed quite happily with the notion that their political decision-making processes were pragmatic and experimental, based on practical experience rather than on irre-

⁷⁵ The crowd (*ochlōi*) = the ignorant (*tois mē eidosin*): 459a. Wardy (*Birth of Rhetoric*, 62–67) emphasizes the antidemocratic thrust of Gorgias’ argument, and notes that Socrates’ response shows why, given the democratic political structure, Gorgias’ concern with rhetoric’s omnipotence is justified.

futable knowledge. But within the logic of Plato's argument, the equation of rhetoric with pastry-cooking is a deadly blow. With this distinction in mind, Plato's reader begins to grasp the fundamental incompatibility between the Athenian demos and philosophy and the irrelevance of any philosophical attempt to persuade the mass audience. The ground is being laid for a Socrates who must stand silent with nothing useful to say at his own trial.

Based on rhetoric's lack of standing as a *technē* (i.e., a skill that can accomplish genuine good), Socrates claims that *rhētores* are not, after all, the most powerful men in the poleis but indeed are the least powerful in terms of being able to do genuine good to anyone. This shocks Polus, who retorts that *rhētores* are in fact like tyrants in that they are able to do whatever seems right to them (*dokēi autois*), including killing people, seizing their property, and sending them into exile (466b–c). Here the shade of the trial of Socrates casts an obvious shadow, but Socrates himself is prepared with a key move: a rational man wishes for the good and wishes for power only insofar as it can accomplish good for its possessor. Yet seeming is not being (i.e., apparent good is not actual good). Thus, even though they do what seems to them to be best, *rhētores* and tyrants do not do themselves the actual good they wish (*boulontai*). Because they are unable to do themselves good, they cannot be truly powerful (466d–e). Flummoxed by the logic of the argument, Polus furnishes a variety of examples as “witnesses” to the happiness of tyrants (and, by analogy, of *rhētores*), but Socrates will have none of it: “You keep trying to refute me rhetorically, as those in lawcourts do,” by providing a great number of highly esteemed witnesses, while the other side produces only one or none. But although Polus could no doubt get almost all Athenians, and foreigners, too, to agree to his position, this will still not budge Socrates from his own possession (*ousia*, i.e., philosophy) and the truth (471e–472b). Majority opinion, the subject and object of the *rhētōr*'s practice and the basis of democratic decision-making, is meaningless when the discussion proceeds according to Socrates' rules. Once again, the language recalls and renders problematic Socratic rhetoric in the *Apology*, where Socrates requested that “many” of the jurors serve as his witnesses (19c–d).

Ignoring Socrates' rejection of the relevance of public opinion, Polus launches into a hideously detailed description of a hypothetical tortured would-be tyrant and challenges Socrates to prove to the assembled company that the tortured man was actually better off than the successful tyrant. Remarking that Polus' highly colored description makes his flesh creep, Socrates rebukes Polus for laughing at him for sticking by his convictions even when everyone in the house would agree that the tortured man is much less happy than the successful tyrant. Socrates reiterates that he is not interested in a vote among those present since “I'm not one of your politicians.” He then reminisces about how the Athenian demos had laughed at him when, as *prutanis* last year, he proved ignorant of how to put a vote to the Athenian Assembly. So he will not try to put a vote here. Firmly rejecting the authority of the many witnesses against him, Socrates announces that he “cannot carry on a dialogue with *hoi polloi*” (473b –474a)⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ Wardy (ibid., 75–76) argues that Socrates' inability to converse with a group “has nothing to

This is a double-edged rebuttal. It recapitulates the main point of the earlier exchange (truth is proof against the opinion of the majority), but it is also a brilliantly understated rhetorical counter: Polus' inappropriately graphic, made-up account of torture is countered by a veiled but unmistakable (to anyone familiar with the *Apology*) reference to the genuinely horrible Assembly meeting at which the Arginousai generals were condemned. Polus' sarcastic laughter follows quickly upon his creepy rhetorical account of torture and demonstrates its moral emptiness. That laughter echoes the inappropriate laughter of the Athenian demos, who (we are led to suppose) were able to giggle over Socrates' apparent fumbling, all the while preparing to override established legal procedures by sentencing fellow citizens to death without trial.⁷⁷ Socrates' subtle and indirect evocation of real political horrors trumps Polus' rhetorical performance and shows that the rhetorician Polus, while capable of using language to evoke an emotional reaction (Socrates' skin creeps), has no deep understanding of the real world of democratic politics in which rhetorical stimulation of strong emotions in mass audiences can quickly lead to genuine evil. The discussion of the false happiness of the tyrant thus contains within it a slashing attack (reminiscent of Thucydides) on the key democratic doctrine of collective wisdom and on the role of rhetoric in the democratic polis. Moreover, examining the root causes of the unhappy tyrant/*rhētōr*'s inability to wish for what is good for himself will provide Socrates with the opportunity to reveal popular opinion as the root of false appearance and thus as the primary source of political evil.

C.3. Callicles and Erotic Proportions

When Callicles takes the floor as Socrates' primary interlocutor, the dialogue shifts gears. Callicles is much closer to Socrates in that he is himself an Athenian citizen (cf. *Apol.* 20d–30a: Socrates' special responsibility to his fellow citizens as kinsmen) and a budding politician who hopes to wield power in the

do with any élitist attitude towards the many," but points out the practical danger to democracy entailed in continually creating new "intellectual communities with only two members . . . in reality [Socrates'] dialectical activity foment[s] revolution."

⁷⁷ Socrates implies in this passage that he was not only one of the fifty *prutaneis*, but also was the *epistatēs* (i.e., he who puts a measure to the vote). Socrates' service as *prutanis* at the Assembly meeting of 406 at which the Arginousai generals were condemned is confirmed by *Apol.* 32b (above, 4.B.1); Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.15 (Socrates was one of the *prutaneis*). Xenophon in the *Memorabilia* (1.1.18, 4.4.2) goes further, claiming that Socrates was indeed *epistatēs* in 406. Dodds (*Plato: Gorgias*, 247–48) discusses the chronology, ultimately concluding (contra various other scholars) that (a) the *Gorgias* passage must indeed refer to Socrates' service as *prutanis* at the relevant meeting of 406, although (b) Socrates probably was not actually *epistatēs*. In fact, there is little reason to suppose he was not *epistatēs* as well as *prutanis* in 406, as the *Gorgias* passage implies and Xenophon states. The only serious arguments against his service as *epistatēs* in 406 are (1) the silence of the *Apology* passage, and (2) the notion that Socrates as *epistatēs* would have and could have prevented the measure from coming to a vote. But (1) Socrates in the *Apology* is contrasting his stalwart courage to the cowardice of the other *prutaneis*; his service as *epistatēs* is strictly irrelevant. And (2) compare Aeschines 2.84, with Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 115–16: those whose responsibility it was to put votes to the Assembly (by Aeschines' time, one *epistatēs* and nine *proedroi*) were simply not capable of preventing a vote demanded by the Assemblymen.

Athenian state.⁷⁸ It has been suggested that the characterization of Callicles recalls Plato as he might have been, had he not fallen under the influence of Socrates.⁷⁹ Be that as it may, Socrates makes much of his own apparent similarity to Callicles: they share a common affliction (*pathos*) in that they both have two loves: the objects of Socrates' love are Alcibiades and philosophy; Callicles is enamored of the Athenian demos and Demos, the handsome son of Pyrilampes (481d). Experienced lover that he is, Socrates can state with conviction that this double *erōs* has a profound effect on Callicles—you, though skillful (*deinos*) in speech, are unable to contradict your beloved. So if, when you are addressing the Assembly, you say something that is contradicted by the Athenian demos, you change your position (*metaballomenos*) and you say just what the Assembly wishes (*bouletai*). This is because you cannot contradict the counsels and statements of the beloved, even if they are childish. Indeed, if you wished (*bouloio*) to tell the truth, you might admit that the only way that you, as a lover, will stop saying childish things is if someone first stops your beloved from doing so (481d–482a).

The passage strongly recalls Thucydides' account of the role of *erōs* in the Sicilian Debate and is clearly headed in pretty much the same direction: Callicles' burning desire for the approval of the demos puts him under its control and forecloses the option of asserting his own genuine opinions in public debate.⁸⁰ The key difference lies in Socrates' focus on wishing (*boulēsis*); it is the dichotomy between wishing for what seems good and what is good that will shatter Callicles' argument and expose him as the demos' slave. Socrates explains that his own love for philosophy has the same force as that of Callicles for the demos, but with the opposite effect: Callicles cannot remain true to his original convictions when the demos contradicts him, but philosophy-loving (ergo strictly rational and logically consistent) Socrates cannot bring himself to say anything self-contradictory, even though his statements fly in the face of what almost everyone else believes (482b–c).

Callicles slaps away this ironical bouquet by repeatedly accusing Socrates of acting like a public orator (*dēmēgoros*, *dēmēgoreis*, *dēmēgorika*) who deceptively works both sides of the *nomos/phusis* fence as it suits his argument (482c–e). He, Callicles, will not be tricked so easily because he is not ashamed to say what everyone else cravenly elides, that *nomos* and *phusis* are generally opposites. According to Callicles, what is regarded as right by custom is not by any means necessarily right by nature. And by nature it is certainly not right for a "real man" (*anēr*: read Callicles) to suffer injustice; suffering is only naturally

⁷⁸ Cf. Strauss, *City*, 84–85. A similar pattern recurs in the *Republic* (from the metics Cephalus, Polemarchus, and Thrasymachus as Socrates' interlocutors to the Athenians Glaucon and Adeimantus) and in Thucydides' Athenian Assembly speech scenes (from the Corinthians and Corcyraeans as speakers, to Pericles, Cleon, and Diodotus).

⁷⁹ Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 13–14, citing Jaeger, *Paedeia*, 2: 138.

⁸⁰ Can it be mere coincidence that this passage mentions Alcibiades and that Plato has recently cited Nicias by name (472a) and in connection with the *oikia* of Pericles (periphrasis for Alcibiades) as among those who suppose that tyrant/orators are happy?

appropriate for some miserable, better-off-dead slave or someone unable to defend himself or his friends when threatened (read Socrates: 482e–483a).

Having claimed that law and nature are far from identical, Callicles must explain the origin of the distinction. He attempts to do so by positing a primeval social contract. Those who first established the laws were numerous weak men (*astheneis anthrōpoi . . . kai hoi polloi*) who set up the laws and the attendant conventions of praise and blame in their own selfish interests. Their main goal was to frighten and thereby control the more powerful men who dwelled among them, that is, those capable of gaining a greater share, by claiming that self-aggrandizement (*pleonexia*) was shameful and unjust. The establishers of the law took pleasure in equality only because they were inferior (*phauloteroi*). Callicles then claims that this conventional equality is contrary to natural conditions by the analogy of the behavior of other animals and of poleis acting as states (*en holais tais poleisi*), which all follow the rule that the stronger dominate the weaker and take the greater share. Callicles' employment of a social-contract argument and the analogy of animal behavior recall the *Crito* and *Apology*. The analogy of the "polis-as-state" acting on the basis of the natural rule of the strong, however, is reminiscent of Thucydides' arguments about power and human behavior. Notably, Callicles cites two historical examples of acting according to what he portentously calls "the law of nature." His examples are Xerxes' invasion of Greece and Darius' of Scythia (483b–e).

Callicles seems to think that he has done something terribly original in "discovering" that the rule of the many is in the interest of the many and that the masses establish and maintain laws in order to restrain the behavior of the powerful few among them. Yet this is exactly the point made earlier by Ps.-Xenophon (passim) and is very similar to the argument that would later be made by the public orator Demosthenes when arguing a case against his enemy Meidias in the Athenian people's court. According to Demosthenes, the laws of the democracy allow the superior collective power of the demos to be brought to bear upon the uncontrolled elite. Demosthenes states that it is the jurors' collective duty to ensure that mass power was used effectively to control would-be supermen like Meidias (or, we might add, Callicles). Demosthenes makes no claim to originality in making this point—rather, he is reminding the Athenian jurors of their own deepest convictions about the importance of political equality and their deepest fears about the threat posed to democratic equality and citizen dignity by those who are unequal in various ways.⁸¹ Thus, any reader familiar either with the critical tradition or with Athenian courtroom rhetoric will immediately see that Callicles' position on the relationship between the many and the potentially powerful few is deeply conventional. By parroting what is, by the early fourth century, a standard viewpoint on the relationship between the many and the few, Callicles is doing exactly what Socrates has said he must do because of his love for the demos: saying just what the demos says, no matter how childish. In this relatively private "indoor"

⁸¹ On Demosthenes 21, see 4.n.48.

conversation, Callicles scorns the mass-elite relationship as an unnatural social construct. But the Athenian democracy was predicated specifically upon constructing reality through the social practice of performative speech—the real question is not whether social bonds are “natural,” but how strong are the social bonds created by democratic speech acts.

Callicles is not a very careful historian: both great military expeditions he cites as examples of the “natural” tendency of the strong to dominate the weak famously failed to accomplish their ends. But this obvious and inconvenient fact does not detain Callicles, who is encouraged by the example of the Persian kings (and presumably of the “ten thousand other” examples he claims that he could cite) to suppose that the unnatural law of the weak is a fragile construct that could easily be shattered by the actions of a real man who acts according to the laws of nature.⁸² The natural elite of the strong was, in Callicles’ view, restrained only by social indoctrination: As it is, “we” (sc. Athenians) mold the strong and superior by taking them when young, like lions, and by educating (*katapaidontes*) and enchanting (*gõteuontes*) them we enslave them, by telling them that equality is necessary, fine, and just. But if a real man with “a sufficient nature” (*phusis hikanē*) should be born, he will

shake off all these fetters, break through his bonds and run free, trampling underfoot our writings and magic charms (*magganeumata*) and spells (*epōidai*) and laws, which are all contrary to nature. Then is our slave, risen up, revealed to be our master. There and at that point does the justice of nature flash forth. (483e–484a)

Callicles has given as clear and compelling an account as one could ask for of the operations of democratic ideological hegemony. It is by the social construction of law and the conventions of praise and blame, and by ideological mystification that focuses on the putative virtues of equality, that the mass maintains its domination over the “natural” elite. So far so good. But Callicles also contends that the grip of the mass is tenuous (and Callicles is thus optimistic about the future) because of the visible contrast between law and nature. When someone comes along who is able to see the world as it really is, he will effortlessly smash the socially constructed limits on his behavior and will immediately take his rightful place as the master of society. Callicles’ speech inverts, or at least defers, Gorgias’ position on the power of the *rhētōr* to enslave (since, as it is now, it is through speech that the inferior masses enslave the superior individual). It also obliquely attempts to blunt the force of Socrates’ argument about *erōs*. The superior man not only will break free of the bonds of words, but he will also shatter the magical binding spells of the sort used to capture and hold

⁸² Herodotus’ *Histories* was already the canonical account, and it is not necessary to be an over-subtle reader of Herodotus to get the points that (1) both expeditions were striking failures, and (2) they failed due to hubristic overreaching on the part of the Persian kings; see Strauss and Ober, *Anatomy*, 17–43. Always wanting more, in Herodotus’ fairly conventional view, was a prelude to disaster; Callicles is idiosyncratic within the Greek tradition in supposing that it is a part of true happiness. See also King, “Herodotus”; Balot, “Genealogy of Greed.”

the affection of a beloved.⁸³ Implicitly accepting Socrates' erotic metaphor, Callicles is claiming that once he has revealed himself as a superior man, he will not be constrained by charms and spells to remain faithful to his demos-lover and will be able to speak with his own voice.

The obvious consequence of Callicles' argument is that the would-be master should cultivate the techniques that will allow him to shed his socially induced illusions and see the world as it really is. He must get past appearances to arrive at actualities; move beyond seeming to the realm of being, so that he can wish for what is good for him and strive for the bigger share of goods and power that is his natural birthright. Socrates has already demonstrated that only philosophy can accord the true knowledge that allows one to separate seeming from being and to wish for what is actually good for oneself and one's polis. But Callicles claims that it is only when Socrates *abandons* philosophy that he will "know the truth of the matter" (484c). He then launches into an extended attack on philosophy as suitable only for children and pathetics: Philosophy makes a person inexperienced (*apeiros*) in all the things in which he must be experienced (*empeiros*) if he is to be a "gentleman" (*kalos k'agathos*) and a "well-regarded man" (*eudokimos . . . anēr*, 484c–d). Philosophers are inexperienced in the *nomoi* of the polis, in the language that must be used in public and private contracts (*sumbolaioi*), in human pleasures and desires—in short, utterly inexperienced in human natures (*ēthē*, 484d). And thus when it comes to public or private action (*praxis*), philosophers make a laughingstock of themselves just as politicians do when they are lured into philosophical arguments (484d–e). He who lingers too long in philosophy eventually becomes unmanly (*an-andros*); he flees from the center of the polis and from the *agora*, where reputations are made; and he spends his life whispering in a corner with a few adolescents. As a result, he never says anything befitting a man who is free (*eleutheron*), important (*mega*), or adequate (*hikanon*, 485d).

Given the contexts established by the setting of the dialogue and by Socrates' unrefuted arguments, Callicles' attack on philosophy is not very convincing. Callicles, the ventriloquized demos-lover, seems to suppose that it is easy to break the fetters of democratic social conditioning and to see the truth, and that he has in fact seen it. But his speech about the inadequacy of philosophy immediately reveals that he regards it as a mark of liberation to worry oneself over personal reputation, polis law, contracts, pleasures, and desires; moreover, he supposes that knowledge of these things is to be gained by practical experience: *empeiria*—a term Socrates has previously defined as best exemplified by pastry-cooking. Callicles accuses Socrates of avoiding the city center and *agora*, whereas it is Socrates who has arrived late for Gorgias' performance because he was detained in the *agora*, and Socrates has demonstrated that he has a very good practical knowledge of the operations of the polis' public fora.

⁸³ Callicles' vocabulary (e.g., *goēteia*, *mageia*, *epōidai*) and his association of enchantment and persuasion echo the writing of the real Gorgias: *Helen* 10, with Wardy, *Birth of Rhetoric*, 40–42. On erotic binding spells, see Winkler, *Constraints*, 71–98.

If the corner-huddler label is demonstrably inappropriate for Socrates, it might perhaps be hung on Gorgias and his pupils—they seem to know relatively little about the actual workings of the polis, and we remember that Gorgias is staying as a private guest at Callicles' house. How could Callicles get it so wrong?

According to the logic of the dialogue, Callicles' attack on philosophy confirms what the reader should already suspect: that Callicles is caught and restrained by precisely the social bonds and conventional assumptions that he claimed the superior man would be able to break. He is blinded by his socialization—which we now realize includes a deep suspicion of Socratic philosophy—to the reality that Socratic philosophy might be able to reveal to him. Nothing in the dialogue calls into question the accuracy of Callicles' description of the mystifying operations of egalitarian, democratic ideology, but the dialogue points to the extreme difficulty of freeing oneself from that ideology. Becoming truly "free" requires much more than getting the simple point that *nomos* and *phusis* may be different. Because he is not willing to do the hard work of philosophy, Callicles thinks himself a master and a predator while revealing himself to be a slave and a victim of popular ideology.

Blissfully unaware of his own blinders and fetters, Callicles describes Socrates' vulnerability to victimization:

For as it is, if someone were to seize you, or someone like you, and drag you off to jail, claiming you did wrong though you had not, you know that you would not know what to do. You'd gape about dizzily with nothing to say. When you came into court, even if your accuser was a low-class nobody, you'd be killed if he wished (*bouloito*) to exact the death penalty. So how is this wisdom, Socrates? What sort of *technē* is it that "takes one well endowed naturally and corrupts him," unable to help himself or save himself or anyone else from the worst dangers? But stripped of his entire estate (*ousia*) by his enemies, without *technē* he lives on in his polis disenfranchised [or "dishonored": *atimos*]. To put it perhaps crudely, one can punch such a man in the face without paying the penalty.⁸⁴ (486b–c)

This passage obviously recalls the circumstances of Socrates' trial and invites readers to compare Callicles' depiction of Socrates on trial with Plato's depiction of Socrates in the *Apology*. The Socrates of the *Apology* had a good deal to say to the Athenian jurors, but was convicted nonetheless. To readers of the *Apology*, Callicles' challenge is clear: if Socrates had not wasted his life with philosophy, but had learned the practical skills Callicles recommends, Socrates would have been able to defend himself successfully against Meletus and company. Yet, in the context of Callicles' errors about Socrates' way of life and his own deluded state—his entrapment by the very ideology he himself had described so eloquently—Callicles' prediction appears drastically flawed. If Socrates is not the pathetic corner-huddler of Callicles' imagination, perhaps he is not a helpless victim either. The way he chooses to defend himself in the peo-

⁸⁴ The significance of the close association between physical assault (specifically, a blow to the face), dishonor, disenfranchisement, and the ability to defend oneself in court is clarified by Demosthenes 21; cf. the works cited in note 4.n.48.

ple's court (if not the outcome of that choice) may be a matter of what he actually wishes, rather than how he is constrained to act through a lack of technical resources.

In response to Callicles' threat of destruction in the courts, Socrates first ironically praises Callicles' true knowledge (*epistēmē*), benevolence, and frank speech (*parrhēsia*)—the last a distinctly Athenian attribute (as Plato has reminded us in the exchange with Polus, 461e) and one that Socrates says distinguishes Callicles from the two foreigners (487b). The debate is now overtly between two Athenian citizens, and about the characteristics proper to the true citizen and the leader of citizens. Moreover, Socrates acknowledges that Callicles is “sufficiently well educated, as many Athenians will attest.”⁸⁵ This claim is a verbal echo and an ironic contrast to Callicles' hypothetical superman of “sufficient nature” and points to the social roots of Callicles' mystified condition. Callicles himself had claimed (483e) that education, along with enchantment, was the means by which the “young lions” were enslaved. Socrates suggests that “the many” quite rightly regard Callicles as “sufficiently educated” so as to be fully under their own demotic spell.

Socrates now sets out to demonstrate that, far from being a brave superman who sees the world as it is, Callicles agrees with the masses and acknowledges them as his superior. Prompted by Socrates, Callicles initially asserts that the more powerful (*kreitton*) is the better (*beltion*) and the stronger (*ischuroteron*, 488c–d). But, as Socrates counters, the many are clearly more powerful than the individual since they establish *nomoi* binding on the individual. Thus the customary rules (*nomima*) of the many are, by Callicles' own logic, actually the rules of the more powerful and better, and, moreover, they are natural. Because the powerful many believe (*nomizousi*) that equality is right and that it is more shameful to do than to suffer wrong, these beliefs are fine and natural, and there is no meaningful distinction to be drawn between what is conventionally regarded as right and what Callicles claims is naturally right (488d–489b). This is a very important point: mystified Callicles equates power with strength and excellence. He is forced to admit that the many, who are (collectively) unquestionably stronger than any individual, are superior to the individual, and that both their rule over him and their opinions are fine and just according to his own understanding of “nature.” This is indeed an accurate description of the popular understanding of *dēmokratia*, which was predicated very directly on the superior power (*kratos*) of the mass of citizens (*dēmos*); Callicles' error is in supposing that his own thinking is importantly different from that of the demos. Moreover, Socrates' argument underlines the point that democratic customs and beliefs are not fragile at all; rather, they represent the will of those who are truly strong and unlikely to relinquish their power. The shackles of convention are thus likely to be extraordinarily difficult for any individual to break—and impossible without the critical resources of philosophy.

Callicles is unhappy with this turn in the argument, and backs away from his

⁸⁵ *pepaideusai te gar hikanōs, hōs polloi an phēsaien Athēnaiōn*, 487b.

prior equation of power with strength: If that original equation held, then whenever a loose rabble of slaves and randomly selected men, worthy only by virtue of bodily strength, should assemble, whatever they happened to assert (*houtoi phōsin*) would constitute customary rules (489c).⁸⁶ This can be read as a hostile description of the speech-act process of the Athenian Assembly. The lover of the demos is beginning to see the implications of his infatuation and soon agrees that by the better and more powerful he really meant the wiser (*phronimōteron*), and that the one wise man would actually be more powerful than “ten thousand others” and should rule (490a) –the wording immediately recalls and refutes Callicles’ “ten thousand other witnesses” (483e) to the natural right of the strong to dominate the weak. This is a key moment in the argument: the superiority of the claims of the one wise man against a multitude of hostile witnesses with false opinions is the position Socrates has been defending all along, and will provide the basis of his eventual claim to be the one true practitioner of the *technē* of politics.

Socrates next dispenses with Callicles’ belief that the superior man should have or should wish to have more (possessions, pleasures, or power) than the rest. Quickly overwhelmed by the absurdity of the superior person wishing to have having a surfeit of ordinary material goods (cloaks, shoes, and so on), Callicles nonetheless asserts that the better and more powerful are “people who are wise (*phronimous*) in respect to the affairs (*pragmata*) of the polis and brave (*andreious*). It is seemly (*prosēkei*) that these men should rule over the poleis, and it is just that they possess more than the others and are rulers over the ruled” (491c –d). This revised definition is an improvement on Callicles’ earlier position, but it soon transpires that he imagines that the rigid distinction between rulers and ruled precludes self-mastery (*enkrateia*) on the part of the rulers. This Callicles despises as a kind of slavery, and as just another trick of the numerous weak. No one who had once enjoyed the pleasures of absolute rule, whether tyranny or oligarchy (*dunasteia*), would “introduce a master (*despotēs*) over himself, namely the *nomos*, the *logos*, and the censure (*psogos*) of the many,” by acting according to *sophrosunē* and *dikaiosunē*; rather, such a man would seek to increase his access to pleasure. Any progress Callicles might seem to have made toward Socrates’ position has been lost, and we are back to nature versus custom: For Callicles, it is only worthless “human agreements” (i.e., his postulated primeval social contract) that make *pleonexia* seem shameful. Therefore it is only those persons beset by weakness and unmanliness (*anandreia*) who submit to the opinion that Socrates truly holds and that the many assert (at least in public): that it is a good thing to rule over pleasures and desires in oneself (491d–492c).

The “happy tyrant” argument is now predicated on the natural rightness of maximizing pleasure, which in turn means maximizing desire so as to maxi-

⁸⁶ Kahn (“Drama and Dialectic,” 99 –100) notes that Socrates’ exposure of the weaknesses in Callicles’ argument is especially telling given Callicles’ own personal position: at once an ambitious politician who must flatter the demos and a haughty aristocrat who despises “mechanics” and rejects egalitarian principles.

mize satisfaction of desire. But, having abandoned Socratic wisdom as a precondition for true powerfulness, Callicles is back in the world of the domination of the strong, and in Athens, it is the demos that is strongest. Despite Callicles' reiterated objection that he is acting the demagogue (494d), Socrates quickly shows that the impulse to maximize desire and pleasure logically results in the lifestyle of the penetration-loving homosexual (*kinaidos*), a pathetic creature (in the view of Socrates, Callicles, and "the many") who has strong "itches" (desires) and gets them scratched (satisfied) regularly (494e).⁸⁷ This leaves Callicles, the *rhētōr* who plans to use his political training to achieve a place in the democratic state equivalent to that of a tyrant, in the role of the willing catamite. The image of Callicles, the would-be tyrant-orator, being endlessly penetrated sexually due to his bottomless desire (*epithumia*), is not casual. By employing sexual imagery familiar from Old Comedy, Plato cuts to the heart of Callicles' "manliness" obsession, and reveals the true nature of his love affair with the demos.⁸⁸ As long as Callicles is driven by the unrestrained itch of *epithumia*, it is the demos, the more powerful, senior partner in the relationship, that will take the actively aggressive role in doing the "scratching." Callicles is revealed as the sort of fellow who ends up liking the passive role of the *kinaidos*—which Socrates calls awful, shameful, and wretched (494e). Callicles' responds to this chain of reasoning and its deliberately coarse culminating metaphor by asking Socrates if he is not ashamed to use such language. And thus the dialogue demonstrates the utterly conventional reactions of this man, who claims that it is only the weak who are ashamed to speak the unvarnished truth.

The *kinaidos* metaphor reasserts, in a most graphic way, Callicles' inferior relationship vis-à-vis the entity he foolishly supposes he can dominate through the power of speech. It is Callicles' will to power that is the itch that the demos scratches by allowing him the capacity to kill, exile, and confiscate the property of his fellow citizens by attacking them in the people's courts and other democratic institutions (per Polus' original position). And who will Callicles' itchy desires lead him to attack? Presumably it is Socrates, whom he has obliquely threatened by describing the philosopher's judicial vulnerability. In the first address to Callicles, Socrates emphasized their similarities, leading the reader (especially in this dialogue, which is much concerned with symmetry and proportion, e.g., 508a) to think about Callicles, Socrates, and their relationship to eros in terms of a symmetrical arrangement (see Figure 1).

⁸⁷ The *kinaidos* as an Athenian social type: Winkler, "Laying Down the Law." Kahn, "Drama and Dialectic," 105–7, and Wardy *Birth of Rhetoric*, 81–82, discuss the social, political, and personal ramifications for Callicles of assimilation to the *kinaidos*.

⁸⁸ Image of demos as passive/active lover: Aristophanes *Knights*, with comments of Nightingale (*Genres*, 187–90) who suggests that in this passage Plato is "harnessing comedy's 'voice of criticism'" (190). Cf. Pericles' injunction in the Funeral Oration to Athenian citizens to "become the lover" (*erastēs*) of the polis, with discussion of Monoson, "Citizen as *Erastes*." The association of manliness and rhetorical performance recurs in the era of the Second Sophistic: Gleason, *Making Men*.

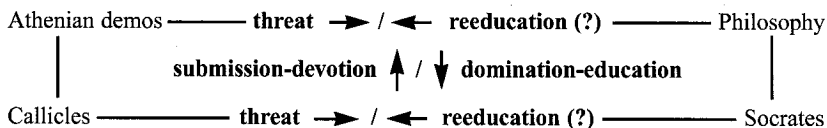


Figure 1

If Callicles stands in an inferior, tutorial relationship to the demos and threatens Socrates, who seeks to reeducate him, then Socrates stands in an inferior relationship to philosophy, and philosophy is threatened by the very demos that it seeks to reeducate. The key distinction brought out by the symmetrical scheme is the nature of the erotic relationships between senior and inferior partners. Although his adherence to *sōphrosunē* ensures that Socrates' desires are restrained and his relationship with philosophy is in no way disgraceful, surely it is fair to say that he regards philosophy as the senior partner, responsible (in the erotic terms Plato would develop in the *Phaedrus*) for the moral development of the beloved. Socrates' *kinaidos* metaphor implies by contrast that Callicles' erotic relationship with the Athenian demos ends in the corruption of both lover and beloved.

The symmetrical relationship sketched above suggests that the problem of the demos and its would-be leaders was in fact central to Plato's conception of philosophy, and thus that Platonic philosophy can legitimately be read as existing in a dynamically critical relationship with popular rule. But we should not suppose that Plato's criticism was meant to be destructive. In subjecting Callicles to his elenchus, Socrates is attempting to reeducate Callicles (or to allow him to reeducate himself) by breaking the hold of the original mystifying education with which Callicles' demos-lover had provided him (cf. above on Callicles' "sufficient education"). This in turn suggests that philosophy might attempt to reeducate the demos.⁸⁹ A "reeducated" Callicles will recognize the true demands of justice and so will never be a threat to Socrates, no matter how judicially vulnerable the latter might be. And likewise a reeducated demos would not threaten the practice of philosophy. Much of the rest of the dialogue explores these hopeful possibilities. By the end of the dialogue, however, the apparent failure of Socratic persuasion and the intransigence of Callicles offer little hope for any of the participants in the proportional formula, at least as long as they remain in the polis-as-it-is.

C.4. Socrates' Political *technē*

After demonstrating that the pleasant and the good are not the same, and that it is only the skilled man (*technitēs*) who can determine which pleasant things are good and which evil, Socrates reiterates to Callicles his serious intent:

Our argument now concerns what even a man of small intelligence must be most earnestly concerned with, how one should live one's life. Whether it is the life you

⁸⁹ For a different approach to this issue, see Euben, "Democracy and Political Theory."

[*su*: singular] summon me to, doing the things appropriate to a “real man”: speaking in the Assembly and practicing rhetoric and being political in the way that you [*humeis*: plural] currently practice politics. Or whether it is the philosophical life . . . if these really are two lives, [it is necessary] to examine the difference and decide which of them is better. (500c–d)

There is a significant shift in this passage from the singular *su* to the plural *humeis*; “you–Callicles” summon Socrates, but “you –politicians and Athenians” practice politics: the argument is thus generalized, and pits Socrates not just against Callicles but against the Athenian political establishment. After demonstrating that dithyramb and tragedy are solely aimed at pleasure, and so are rhetorical, demagogic, and a sort of flattery (501d–502c), Socrates addresses the character of “rhetoric directed to the Athenian Assembly and other assemblies of free men in other poleis.” Rhetoric, as currently practiced, is simply a way of seeking to gain the *charis* of the citizens who are treated like children, in order to secure the private advantage of a few orators at the expense of the public good (502d–503a). Notably, Socrates’ attack on *rhētores* on the charge of self-interest and *charis*-seeking is amply paralleled in actual fourth-century public orations.⁹⁰ But in oratory, the charge of self-interest is invariably leveled by one orator at particular opponents, with the implied corollary that some orators (e.g., the present speaker) do seek the public good. Socrates denies that any Athenian politician, past or present, made the demos better in terms of satisfying only good desires and never evil ones: not Themistocles, not Pericles (503a–d).⁹¹ The *rhētores* of contemporary Athens are not to be contrasted with their political predecessors, but with the Socratic ideal: the *technikos* and *agathos rhētōr* who addresses the whole of his speech and action to the improvement of the souls of “his citizens” (504d –e).

With the two sorts of politics (Athenian actuality and Socratic ideal) sketched out, Socrates can return to the question of whether Callicles was right in saying that Socrates would be unable to help or save himself or others when faced with the great danger posed by a “voluntary prosecutor.”⁹² Socrates initially posits, and Callicles avidly agrees, that if a man does not wish to suffer injustice, he must arm himself with powerful resources.⁹³ The *technē* of such provisioning is to rule over the polis, by being either a tyrant or a loyal comrade (*hetairoi*) of the existing order (*politeia*, 510a). Yet security (which Callicles has now con-

⁹⁰ *Charis*-seeking and self-interest of public speakers criticized by orators: Ober, *Mass*, 321–23.

⁹¹ This might be read as an attack on Thucydides’ depiction of Themistocles and Pericles as far-sighted politicians (above, 2.C.1) who were to be contrasted with the “new politicians” who arose after Pericles’ death; see Yunis, *Taming*, 136–53.

⁹² *ho boulomenos*: Socrates here uses the technical term for the individual and self-nominated initiator of an Athenian legal or political action (Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, 71–72, 266–68, arguing that *ho boulomenos* was “the real protagonist of the Athenian democracy”), but the root term also recalls the key *boulēsis* argument: 508c–d.

⁹³ *dunamin paraskueasetai*, 509d. The language here, as in this section of the dialogue generally, is strongly reminiscent of Thucydides. On Thucydides’ use of the terminology of “preparation,” see Allison, *Power and Preparedness*.

vinced himself is the same as power) comes at a great cost: the only way to be safe under a tyrant is to submit to him, agree with everything he says, be ruled by him, and indeed, be as much like him as possible (510b–e). Given that the discussion has been centered on politics in democratic Athens, the “tyrant” in question is transparently the Athenian demos, and those who submit to the tyrant-demos by becoming like it are the *rhētores*. This becomes explicit when Socrates points out that skill at public rhetoric is what saves those who find themselves in court (511c–d). In Callicles’ case,

so now are you to become most similar (*homoiotaton*) to the Athenian demos if you are to be its beloved (*prospilēs*) and have great power in the polis? . . . If you think anyone can give you a *technē* such that it makes you greatly powerful in the polis and yet dissimilar (*anomoion*) to its *politeia* for better or worse, you are ill advised, Callicles. For it is necessary for you to be not merely an imitator, but naturally like them (*autophuōs homoion toutois*) if you are to achieve a genuine friendship (*philia*) with the Athenian demos or, by god, with Demos, son of Pyrilampes here. Whoever will make you most like them, he will also make you, since you desire to be a politician, into a politician and a *rhētōr*. (513a–b)

Callicles now finally begins to glimpse the true import of Socrates’ argument—that it is the demos, not Callicles, who defines the terms of their relationship—but he is still a long way from cured of his mystification and infatuation: “I don’t know how it is, but you seem to me to make sense, Socrates. Yet I suffer from the affliction of the many;⁹⁴ I am not completely persuaded by you” (513c). While the logic of Socrates’ argument is compelling, he is still unable to convince Callicles to act accordingly. The ideological fog remains too dense for persuasion to occur, but Socrates holds out the hope that the fog could be dissipated given enough time and effort: “It is your love of demos, Callicles, which is in your soul, that resists me. But perhaps if we could consider these very issues more often and better, you would be persuaded” (513c –d). This a pregnant moment, and perhaps the most optimistic in the dialogue. Callicles has, at least momentarily, come to realize that he is infected with a certain “illness” and that the source of his illness is “the many” —the very demos that he has been taught to try to imitate, even to the point of losing his individual identity and voice. Callicles’ ideological education by his demos-lover, reinforced by his intense desire for power and recognition in the polis, and further

⁹⁴ *pepontha de to tōn pollōn pathos*. I have translated *hoi polloi* as “the many” —i.e., the Athenian citizen masses, rather than merely “most people,” and *pathos* as disease rather than merely “feeling”; compare Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 352 (who argues that a distinction is drawn here between logic and psychological conviction: Callicles cannot be convinced by logic but is attracted to Socrates’ argument nonetheless); Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias*, ad loc. (disputing Dodds’ distinction); Wardy, *Birth of Rhetoric*, 83 (emphasizing the optimism of Callicles’ “curious confession”). The point seems to me not merely that Callicles feels the way that many other people do, but that Callicles suffers from the disease that not only afflicts *hoi polloi* but is endemic to them. Callicles, in this reading, admits that he has a bad case of “the *hoi polloi* disease.” It is this disease that Socratic political *technē* qua therapy seeks to cure; the medical metaphor becomes explicit in Socrates’ contrast between the doctor and the pastry cook; see below.

augmented by the rhetorical training he is receiving from Gorgias, still binds him and prevents him from being fully persuaded by Socrates, the one “good and skilled orator.” But given further philosophical discussion, there seems to be a real chance that Socratic rhetoric would prevail and that Callicles might be persuaded to undertake the effort to break loose. Yet the moment soon passes, Socrates’ attempt at therapeutic persuasion fails, and Callicles relapses into stubborn opposition. It is becoming increasingly clear that Socratic rhetoric is incapable of achieving perlocutionary effects in the polis-as-it-is.

Socrates does not give up yet. He reiterates the key distinction between “ignoble” politics as it is –a form of flattery aimed at pleasure– and politics as it should be –a *technē* aimed at improvement “not by gratification, but by battling it through.”⁹⁵ This tag line neatly sums up Socratic politics as critical resistance and once again recalls Socrates’ refusal to accept Callicles’ description of Gorgias’ rhetorical performance as “war and battle.” The root contrast drawn here is between *charis*-seeking and battle –just as elsewhere in the dialogue the contrast is between *charis*-seeking and medical treatment (*therapeia*, e.g., 513e). There is no contradiction in Socrates’ argument between politics as “doing battle” with one’s fellow citizens and politics as “curing” them because, for Socrates, the philosopher/true politician’s active critical resistance to ideological mystification is therapeutic for the individual citizen and the polis. The question remains: “Which polis?” in that the dialogue insistently answers: “Not Athens –or any other existing community.”

The improvement of a citizenry as a whole is a daunting task, and Socrates suggests that anyone claiming to be able to achieve it had best have a very good resume –that is, be able to show that he had good teachers and that he had improved other individuals. Having demonstrated that “to be a politician among us” (*politeuesthai en hēmin*) should mean “making us better as citizens” (*beltistoi hoi politai ōmen*) (515b–c), Socrates returns to his examination of the great Athenian politicians of the past and argues that none of them had actually improved the citizenry. In answer to Callicles’ rejoinder that the story of Pericles corrupting the citizens by offering pay for state service was something Socrates had heard from “the cauliflower-ear crowd” (i.e., antidemocratic, leisured aristocrats who spent their lives practicing athletics), Socrates responds, “I didn’t just *hear* this, but you and I *know* it very well”: Pericles was punished by the Athenians near the end of his career (515e–516a). The point is that (again by analogy with animal training) the truly good leader (*prostatēs*) of the polis would have made the citizens gentle and tame, and so would never have been attacked by them. The former leaders whom “they” say made the polis great, actually were mere flatterers who made it into nothing but a swollen tumor, filled with what the demos desired: the external symbols of power (harmors, walls, shipsheds, tribute), but not with *sōphrosunē* or *dikaiosunē*. When the weakness that attends the lack of these true goods inevitably comes to the polis, “they” berate the current advisors, but foolishly continue to praise the old

⁹⁵ *mē katacharizomenon, alla diamachomenon*, 513d.

leaders who are actually responsible for (*aitioi*) current problems (518e–519c).⁹⁶ Who are “they”?

Much of this passage is very reminiscent of Thucydides. Both Socrates’ allusion to the hearing versus knowing dichotomy and Callicles’ reference to the problem of potentially biased sources of historical information recall the historian, who had in fact singled out Themistocles and Pericles for special praise, and had contrasted them with their inferior successors. Yunis argues that Plato had Thucydides’ Pericles specifically in mind when writing these passages.⁹⁷ Even without assuming a direct intertextual relationship between Thucydides and the *Gorgias*, however, it seems legitimate to read “them” as other critics of democracy whose approach to critical resistance was less global than Plato’s own. Thus, the text is double-edged. Not only does it criticize the practices and premises of democracy (past and present), but it demonstrates the inadequacy of critical approaches that fall short of “battling it through.” That battle entailed launching a frontal assault on the very foundation of popular rule by demonstrating the seniority of the demos in the relationship between politician and people and the inability of democratic leaders of any stripe to accomplish anything other than to contribute to an ongoing process of corruption. The distinction between Socratic politics and criticism and their ordinary demotic counterparts is underlined by Callicles’ final admission that the political practice he has called upon Socrates to take up does not constitute “going to battle with the Athenians” (*diamachesthai Athēnaiois*) in order to improve them like a doctor, but rather it is a form of “menial service” aimed at gaining *charis* and avoiding execution when attacked by a voluntary prosecutor in the people’s courts (521a–c).

Those who willingly engage in battle, rather than spending their time in preparing the means of personal security, risk their lives. Callicles warns Socrates that the latter is overconfident about his chances of survival. But Socrates knows perfectly well that in “*this* polis,” anything can happen, and he fully expects that if he is accused by some evil man (by definition only an evil man would accuse an innocent one), he will in fact be killed. His fate is assured precisely because he is one of the few Athenians, if not the only one, “truly to undertake the political *technē* and to practice politics (*prattein ta politika*) (521c–e)—that is, the only one who tries to improve his fellow citizens through critical struggle, rather than seeking to gratify them and to become like them. Because he will not address his fellows in the flattering way they desire,

⁹⁶ The past leaders are the cause of corruption, not because they happened to be bad men, but because they failed to tame the demos and cure it—i.e., because they allowed themselves to be led and educated by the demos rather than challenging and seeking to change existing mores.

⁹⁷ Yunis, *Taming*, 34, 136, 142–45. Other possible Thucydidean echoes relevant to the subject of this book include 461c (on *erga* and *logoi*), 447b and 484d (on *epithumia*), 515–16 (on hearing and knowing). Contrast de Romilly, *Thucydides*, 362–66: while Thucydides’ work afforded an intellectual point of departure for Plato and there is similarity among some of their arguments, there is no reason to suppose that Plato knew Thucydides’ history and attempts to prove it are unsuccessful. See review of earlier discussions by Luschkat, “Thukydides,” 1280–84.

his position in court will be equivalent to that of the doctor being tried by the pastry cook before a jury of children.⁹⁸ If the doctor claims that his nasty-tasting medicine is really good for the ignorant brats, won't they just make a great fuss (521e–522a)? The doctor in such a trial would be at an utter dead end (*en pasēi aporiai*, 522a–b) regarding what to say—and so will Socrates when accused of corrupting the youth and slandering their elders by saying harsh words “in private or public.” He will “be able to say neither the truth, that ‘Justly I say all those things and I do so acting in your interest (*to humeteron dē touto*), jurymen,’ or anything else (*oute allo ouden*).” And so he will suffer whatever comes his way (522b–c). Yet if he is convicted due to a lack of flattering rhetoric, he will bear his death lightly; it is only conviction on a true charge of having done injustice that he fears.

This passage is a crux, in that it seems overtly to contradict the account of the *Apology*, in which Socrates has a good deal to say to the Athenians, and specifically on the subject of the benefits he has offered them.⁹⁹ Leaving aside the insoluble question of what Socrates *really* said on that day in 399 B.C., what sort of comment on the “Socratic ethics of criticism” is implied by Socrates’ prediction of his own courtroom silence? Plato’s rewriting of his own account of the trial in the *Apology* underlines the new ethical position Socrates has arrived at in the *Gorgias*. Socrates’ speech, the reader now realizes, *cannot* have positive public effects for two reasons: First, because Socrates cannot and will not converse with a mob. But, more importantly, because (as we have now learned) even in an uncoerced one-on-one conversation with an intelligent fellow citizen, Socrates’ rhetoric is insufficient to reeducate an individual who has been thoroughly ideologized by the democratic political culture—at least, not without the extended course of discussions that Calicles refuses to embark upon. Thus Socrates has no real *capacity* to do good in his polis (he cannot “heal” either the political community as a group or the would-be political leader) by “rhetorical” means, and so there is no *purpose* served in delivering a passionate and would-be pedagogical speech in his own defense. Realizing this, the Socrates of the *Gorgias* chooses instead to defend his own dignity by keeping silent before the jurymen-children.

This general position seems to be underlined in two final passages. In his “vision of judgment” Socrates suggests that those who will be condemned to permanent public humiliation in the afterlife as examples of evil men will be mostly tyrants, kings, oligarchs, and “those who engaged in the affairs of

⁹⁸ The reference to “children-jurors” recalls 502e, where Socrates accuses orators in “the Athenian Assembly and other assemblies of free men in other poleis” of treating their audiences “like children” in hopes of securing their own private advantage. These hungry, wild, homicidal children who seek to act according to “nature” may recall for a twentieth-century reader the horrific novelistic vision of childish savagery offered in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*.

⁹⁹ In translating “I do so in your interest” rather than “as is your [i.e., you rhetor]’s expression,” I am following Allen, Jowett, and most earlier commentators against Dodds (*Plato: Gorgias*, 371–72) and Irwin (*Plato: Gorgias*, 241). On the contrast between Socrates’ predicted silence in this passage, and his loquacity in the *Apology*, see Yunis, *Taming*, 157–61.

poleis,” whereas the man most likely to arrive at the Isles of the Blessed is the philosopher who “minded his own affairs and did not live as a busybody (*ou polupragmonēsantos*)” (525d, 526c). It is, I think, hard to make the gleeful self-described gadfly of the *Apology*, who found it impossible to live a “quiet life” (36b, 37d), and went about town busying himself with the affairs of others (*polupragmonō*; 31c), fit this latter description.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, even the Socrates of earlier in the *Gorgias*, who enters the dialogue fresh from the *agora* and demonstrates a deep knowledge of democratic institutions, must be somewhat uncomfortable with it. How does Plato reconcile a Socrates who minds only his own affairs and tends to the care of his own soul with a Socrates committed to “doing battle” with the citizens, who represents himself as the one true practitioner of the political *technē*? Plato can only square the circle by moving Socrates’ critical enterprise out of the democratic polis-as-it-is and into the polis-as-it-should-be, that is, the ideal state of the *Republic*.

In the final passage of the dialogue, Socrates calls on Callicles “and all other people, as far as I am able,” to live according to the unrefuted principles established by the discussion: to prefer suffering injustice to doing wrong; to be (rather than merely seem) good in private and public life; to accept corrective punishment for having erred; and to avoid flattery of few or many, self or other. This may indeed entail putting up with egregious insult or physical abuse, but such matters are irrelevant to the true *kalos k’agathos* who practices virtue (*askōn aretēn*). “And afterwards (*k’apeita*), as we thus practice [virtue] together (*koinēi*), if then, at that point, it seems necessary, we shall enter politics (*epithēsometha tois politikois*), or do whatever else seems right to us, and we shall deliberate accordingly, being better at deliberation (*bouleuesthai*) than we are now.” But as it is now, we have nothing to brag of, since we keep shifting our grounds, “so utterly lacking in education (*apaideusias*) are we.” For the time being, then, we should take our lead from the argument (*logos*), and live our lives as it suggests (*sēmainei*), rather than heeding Callicles’ summons (i.e., to abandon philosophy for demotic politics and rhetoric, 527c–e).¹⁰¹

A key moment in Socrates’ peroration comes with the shift to “afterward” — the deflection or deferment of political engagement to a time when, having practiced virtue “in common,” we will be able to decide according to our actual wishes; when seeming and being will be united. The deferral is predicated on “our” current condition of being “uneducated.” This self-description is particularly striking in light of the importance of the concept of education in each of the three dialogues we have considered so far: in the *Apology*, Socrates was

¹⁰⁰ The Socrates of the *Apology* busies himself with affairs *idiai*, not *dēmosiai*, but (per 4.n.37) this is not properly taken to imply a distinction between “public” versus “private” effects; rather, it points to the speech situation: addresses to decision-making bodies versus conversations with individuals. The Socrates of the *Apology* sees both a communal (public) and an individual (private) good in these conversations, and he willingly engages in these conversations with all comers.

¹⁰¹ With the concluding comment that we must live *hōs ho logos sēmainei* (reiterated at 527c and e), we can see how far Plato has come in redefining two of the key terms (*logos*, *sēmeion*) in the critical vocabulary common to Thucydides and Aristophanes.

convicted of “miseducating” Athenian youth; the Laws of the *Crito* established Socrates’ contractual responsibility to Athens in large part upon the grounds of the beneficial upbringing and education he himself had received; then Callicles was shown to be so “sufficiently educated” by Athenian demotic mores as to be hopelessly indoctrinated. Socrates’ conception of politics as therapy earlier in the *Gorgias* is grounded in what we now realize is a futile attempt to educate individuals like Callicles (and perhaps, by extension, Socrates’ “other love,” Alcibiades) so that philosophy might educate the demos and polis.¹⁰² In sum, in the conversation with Callicles, Plato has defined the political limitations of the “ethics of criticism” established by the *Apology* and *Crito*. If ethics is not to be sundered from politics, then some new ground for ethical conduct is clearly called for.

At the end of the *Gorgias*, Socrates declares himself (along with the rest of “us”) to be “uneducated” —that is, neither properly educated nor ill educated. He seems to be tabula rasa: free of the ideological constraints that bound Callicles and yet demonstrably unprepared for further engagement in politics of any sort until and unless he can somehow become better educated himself. We are to suppose that Socrates’ self-education will be dialogical rather than introspective; he does not foresee engaging in politics until it is possible somehow to practice virtue *in common* with other properly educated people. As long as he remains the “only” master of the political *technē*—as long as his attempts at therapeutic persuasion necessarily remain infelicitous because of the established ideological context of the polis—there can be no real political practice.

This final passage locates the *Gorgias* on a centrally important cusp. On the one hand is the duty to “call all people” to attempt a life that is as just and good as possible. This choice points to the role of the gadfly, and to the austere but relatively straightforward “ethics of criticism” enjoined by the Socrates of the *Apology* and *Crito*. On the other side is the “practice of virtue in common” that may finally lead to the ability to engage in politics, that is, to being able to assume a genuinely therapeutic leadership role within a polis. The apparent failure of Socrates’ high-minded rhetoric to persuade Callicles to abandon his self-destructive passion for the demos, to leave off flattering the Athenians and take up the hard work of “doing battle” with them, has shown the limitations of the former path. And thus, once again, the *Gorgias* points toward the *Republic* as a solution to Plato’s “Socrates and Athens” problem—which is also the problem of how to be a critic of democracy. With the metaphorical death of Socrates, the immanent social critic who was committed to the amelioration of his native polis and its diverse residents, Plato was ready to embark upon his epic rejection of Athenian political culture.¹⁰³

¹⁰² If Socrates’ sort of rhetoric (unlike Gorgias’) really is incapable of producing effects in the polis-as-it-is, then Socrates himself (unlike Gorgias: cf. 457b–c, 460d) cannot justly be blamed if some of those persons (e.g., Alcibiades, Critias) who conversed with him were subsequently to act unethically.

¹⁰³ Irwin (*Plato: Gorgias*, 233) proposes that the *Republic* could be taken as the “thorough consideration” that Socrates (513c –d) suggests would be required to convince Callicles; Yunis *Taming*,

D. A POLIS FOUNDED IN SPEECH: *REPUBLIC*

The *Gorgias* begins to explain why a sincere Socratic might not obey Socrates' implied injunction to his followers to "live as a public gadfly," first by defining the difference between democratic rhetoric and politics and their ideal, Socratic, counterparts, and then by demonstrating the infelicity of Socratic rhetoric in the polis-as-it-is. But the dialogue does not solve the problem of Socrates' own participation in the ideological system. Socrates' language in the *Gorgias* often carries overtones of the democratic Assembly. Socrates' interlocutors repeatedly accuse him of playing the demagogue (e.g., *Grg.* 494d), and at one point Socrates admits that Callicles' silence is indeed forcing him to act like a public speaker (*alēthōs dēmēgorein*, *Grg.* 519d). Moreover, in his debate with Callicles, Socrates identifies his own ethical commitments with what "the many believe" —most notably in the central moral argument that suffering injustice is preferable to doing injustice.¹⁰⁴ Plato's point is, I think, that to inhabit the public domain of the democratic polis is to be affected by and borrow from the language, procedures, and assumptions of the demos—and that his Socrates knows it.

Callicles complains at one point that Socrates is forever speaking of shoemakers, clothes-cleaners, doctors, cooks, farmers, and weavers, just as if the argument were about them.¹⁰⁵ And, in a sense, it is. The Socrates of the *Gorgias* is very much in and at least residually of the quotidian and political world of the democratic polis. That connectedness is an advantage in his elenctic debates with foreigners and inexperienced would-be leaders like Callicles. But by the same token, it seemingly traps Socrates himself in the realm of appearance and opinion, and limits the good he is able to do for anyone other than (perhaps) himself.¹⁰⁶ The follies of Alcibiades and the willful evils committed by Critias as a member of the Thirty surely gave Plato second thoughts (cf. *Seventh Letter*, above, 4.A.2) about Socrates' ability to persuade even his closest associates to live moral lives. If, per the argument of the *Apology*, Socrates had not corrupted them, neither had he been able to immunize them against corruption. The basic problem we are left with at the end of the *Gorgias* is that democratic

161–63) notes how the impasse of the *Gorgias* leads to the attempted solutions of both the *Republic* and the Sicilian plan described in the *Seventh Letter*.

¹⁰⁴ Socrates accused of acting the demagogue in the *Gorgias*: 482c–e, 494d. Socrates identifies certain of his own opinions with those of the many: *Grg.* 488e–489b. Elsewhere (e.g., 491d–e: on *enkrateia* as a virtue) Socrates associates his position with what the many (or other critics; 492e) say in public—which may be implicitly at odds with what they really believe to be true. The many are not said to go so far as to believe that it is *never* right to return wrong for wrong; see above, 4.n.46.

¹⁰⁵ *Grg.* 491a. Cf. Xen. *Mem.* 1.2.37: the same complaint, but this time made by Critias. The parallelism underlines the relevance of the figure of Callicles in the *Gorgias* to the issue of Socrates' responsibility for the actions of his "students."

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Nightingale, *Genres*, 40–59, on Plato's depiction of Socrates as a philosophical "outsider" —who is disembedded from, and thus not compromised by, the exchange relationships of the democratic polis.

rhetoric, politics, and opinion have been proved to be immoral but effective (in that they persuade and so lead to decision and action), while Socratic rhetoric in its purest form is moral but ineffective. To the extent that Socrates *is* persuasive, it is because he employs the opinions and the language of the many to reveal to demos-loving Callicles the extent of his lover's real power to control him. As negative criticism of democracy's sustaining mass ideology and its true power base (i.e., the citizen masses themselves rather than their leaders), the *Gorgias* is devastating—at least for those who are willing to accept Plato's premise that politics must be based strictly on reason and who are persuaded by Socrates' animal-training analogies. But the dialogue remains deeply pessimistic regarding the therapeutic capacity of Socratic rhetoric for either the polis or the ideologized individual, and so it leaves the reader without an alternative politics or pedagogy.

The *Republic* offers a bold solution to the impasse: in this huge dialogue, Socrates will embrace the performative speech-act process of the Athenian Assembly for long enough to found, through speech, a new polis that will foster the growth of a community free from democratic ideology. The citizens of this experimental community will be properly educated and protected against outside influences that might taint their understanding with false opinion.¹⁰⁷ The experimental community will provide the environment in which new and non-democratic grounds for argument can be found and tested. These grounds will allow the philosopher to work backward from his preliminary hypotheses toward the very source of logical discourse (rather than forward toward outcomes) until he arrives at the real, nonhypothetical Truth. And from that Truth he can then move forward to the practice of a politics that will be securely based on knowledge rather than on opinion. All of this takes more than a little doing.

D.1. *Setting the Stage*

The opening scene of the *Republic* focuses the reader's attention on the inefficacy of Socratic persuasion: Socrates and Glaucon (Plato's brother) are making their way back up to the city of Athens after attending a new religious festival in the Piraeus—a port town notorious for its heterogeneous population of metics and traders, as well as for its strong democratic associations.¹⁰⁸ Socrates and Glaucon are accosted by a group of their friends, including Pole-

¹⁰⁷ Foucault ("Discourse on Language," 218–19, 227, 232) makes Plato's career a key divide in his history of the "will-to-knowledge," the shift from a discourse based on (what I would call) speech acts to a discourse based on the search for fixed objects/referents for signifiers. He also points out the importance of a system of institutional supports, and especially pedagogy, for this latter approach. Cf., similarly, LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 115.

¹⁰⁸ Greek text: Burnet (Oxford, 1902). Translation with notes: Bloom, *Plato: The "Republic."* Piraeus as a heterogeneous community and democratic stronghold (esp. during the *stasis* of 404/3): Mossé, "World of the Emporium"; Garland, *Piraeus*, 3, 72. Note that Piraeus is physically linked to the city of Athens by the Long Walls, and thus Socrates need not leave the urban megalopolis (cf. *Phdr.* 230d: Socrates virtually never leaves the walled city).

marchus, son of Cephalus, and Glaucon's brother, Adeimantus. Polemarchus wants them to come to Cephalus' house for conversation and points out that, being more numerous, his party is the stronger. When Socrates claims that, even being just one man, he may still persuade them to let him go, Polemarchus reminds him that persuasion has no purchase on those who refuse to listen. Adeimantus then tempts Socrates with the prospect of watching a spectacle (a horseback torch race) later in the evening. With Socrates' comment, "If it seems right, it must be done" (*ei dokei . . . houtō chrē poiein*; 327a–328b), they repair to Cephalus' house in Piraeus, where the rest of the dialogue will take place. This preliminary exchange, while ostensibly light-hearted and between friends, brings us immediately back to the problems that lay at the heart of the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Gorgias*: the problematic powerfulness of the many when compared to the one, and the inability of a rhetoric that refuses to conform to the desires and pleasure of the audience to persuade—indeed, even to be heard. Moreover, Socrates' comment about the correlation between "that which seems right" and necessary action recalls the enactment formula of the Athenian Assembly; it will soon become apparent that this verbal echo is not accidental.

Socrates' first interlocutor is the wealthy and elderly metic, Cephalus, who claims that his character is such that he bears the thought of death easily. Socrates responds that *hoi polloi* probably disagree that his equanimity is a matter of character; they would point rather to Cephalus' wealth. Cephalus readily agrees: that is just what the many say, and they are partly, but not completely, correct in saying it (329d–e). This exchange establishes an important principle: the opinion of the many is not ipso facto wrong, but neither is it completely correct. The first job of Socrates and his friends will be to take the raw ore of common opinion and refine it so as to separate truth from falsity. Cephalus quickly passes the conversational torch to Polemarchus, who argues in favor of the very conventional Greek view that justice is doing good to friends and fellow citizens, and Polemarchus in turn hands the conversation to Thrasymachus; by now the discussion has settled upon justice as its primary subject. The figure of Thrasymachus, a man who is "eager to speak" because he hopes for a good public reputation (338a) and who asserts that justice is simply the advantage of the stronger (338c), evokes Callicles, and so further links the *Republic* with the *Gorgias*. Moreover, just as in the Callicles debate, Socrates' conversation with Thrasymachus recalls our attention to the trial of 399 B.C.

Thrasymachus views dialogue (as Thucydides' Assembly speakers viewed symbouleutic rhetoric) as a form of verbal contest. He insists that Socrates must pay a penalty should he lose the contest (337d) and later calls Socrates a sycophant (thereby switching the latter's role from defendant to prosecutor, 340d).¹⁰⁹ But this trial is very different from the one Callicles has accurately predicted that Socrates will eventually face. Socrates points out to Thrasymachus that if

¹⁰⁹ Just as in the *Apology*, Socrates' friends offer to pay his "fine" if he loses to Thrasymachus, 337d. On the problematic public role of the "sycophant" in Athenian legal culture, see the exchange between Osborne, "Vexatious Litigation," and Harvey, "Sykophant." Cf. below, 5.B.1, 3.

both sides make long speeches (on the subject of whether the just or the unjust is more profitable), the debate will require judges (*dikastai*: the standard term for Athenian jurymen) to decide its outcome, but if it remains a true dialogue, then “we ourselves will be at once *dikastai* and *rhētores*” (348a –b). The full import of this comment only becomes clear in book 3, when Socrates notes that it is a very bad sign in a polis—shameful and a mark of a severe lack of education (*apaideusia*)—when eminent doctors and judges (*dikastai*) are needed, not only by lowly and menial folk, but even by those who pretend to a liberal upbringing. When there are insufficient native resources, justice must be imported, and so the judges act like masters as well as like arbiters (*hōs despotōn te kai kritōn*, 405a–b). One justification for remaining in a dialogic relationship is, therefore, to keep the discussion an “internal” matter (among an educated elite) and to avoid the shameful necessity of importing judges (who will be like masters) from the outside. If Socrates’ rules of discourse are followed, the little gathering inside Cephalus’ private house will remain a hermetic, closed society, separated from the external world of Athens, in which the people were indeed both judges and, in a very real sense (as Callicles was told), masters of most members of the educated elite.

Thrasymachus supports his definition of justice as “the advantage of the more powerful” (338c) with the familiar argument that in democracies, tyrannies, and aristocracies alike, it is the ruling group (*archē*) that makes laws in its own interest and forces those who are ruled to obey these laws (338d–e). Socrates counters by reference to the certainty of error: inevitably the ruling group will make some laws that will not be in its own genuine interest, so if it is by definition just to obey rulers, then sometimes doing what is just will mean doing what is actually to the disadvantage of the rulers (339b–e). We are back to the problem of *boulēsis* and the difference between being and seeming, but Thrasymachus avoids the trap (into which Callicles fell) of supposing that justice is what *seems* to be to the advantage of the stronger; rather, he claims, it is what is *actually* to their advantage (340c–341a). Yet this stipulation in turn requires access to actual knowledge about what is advantageous. On this basis, Socrates gets Thrasymachus to make a vital concession about the nature of ruling: that each *technē* (qua practice in which knowledge is rationally employed to achieve appropriate ends) both rules over and dominates those things for the sake of which it exists. For example, the *technē* of medicine exists for the sake of the body and, for that reason, rules over it (342c).

This leads to the assumption that in practice, the actual rulers in each sphere should be none other than the master craftsmen (*technitai*) of the relevant *technai*. Thus, in politics, which exists for the sake of the polis, the ruler should be the master of the *politikē technē*. In the conclusion of the *Gorgias*, we learned that it is Socrates alone who can legitimately claim to be a master of the “political craft,” and so, presumably, it is Socrates who must rule the polis. Yet the Socrates of the *Gorgias*, incapable of persuading ideologized citizens, cannot practice politics in the polis-as-it-is, so we are back at an impasse. The Athenian democrat, of course, would accept neither the premises nor the conclusions

of the argument, and so would not acknowledge the *aporia*. As long as that which seems best to the majority is the closest we suppose that we can get to the real interests of *demos* or *polis*, then politics is indeed an *empeiria*—a pragmatic matter of adapting to ever-changing circumstances—and the practitioners of that *empeiria* are the politicians qua dispensable servants of the *demos*. The *Gorgias* had engaged directly with democratic ideals in confronting the implications of the speech-act processes of Athenian public fora, which were predicated on the assumption that what seems right to the many is indeed best for them. With Thrasymachus' admission that seeming is not actuality, the argument of the *Republic* diverges from a direct engagement with the democratic *polis-as-it-is*. This does not mean that it abandons the task of criticism; rather, it points to the move from a negative criticism (why democracy is bad politics) to a positive criticism (what sort of good politics can be provided in its place).

Thrasymachus' acceptance of a fundamental seeming-being distinction means that the argument can proceed on the premise that justice (and thus politics in general) is not a function of opinion, but of knowledge, and so injustice becomes a matter of simple ignorance (e.g., 351a). Socrates claims that injustice (*adikia*) is really neither powerful nor effective, because it causes people to waste energy by dividing into factions and struggling with one another (*kai misē kai machai en allēlois*). Justice is instrumentally more valuable than injustice in that it enables both the individual and the group to accomplish (*prattein*) much more; it does this because it leads to friendship and consensus (*philia, homonoia*, 351c–352a). Here Socrates has apparently embraced a concept celebrated as typical of democratic Athens by Thucydides' Pericles: the strong linkage between consensuality and the capacity for accomplishment (above, 2.C). Socrates seems to have moved away from the ethics of criticism he had defended when arguing with Callicles in favor of the inherent virtuousness of his own ongoing struggle with the citizenry.¹¹⁰ This is not because Socrates no longer thinks it proper to resist the opinions of the many, but rather because the issue is now well on its way to becoming a matter of construction rather than one of deconstruction: Socrates' project in Plato's *Republic* is the foundation of a just order rather than merely an exposure of the failings of an unjust one. The debate with Thrasymachus is thus transitional; it links the *Republic* securely with the themes of the *Gorgias*, while pointing to a more ambitious goal.

D.2. Founding "Logopolis"

The nature of the new project becomes clear in book 2, when Thrasymachus drops out of the picture and Socrates continues the conversation with two much more sympathetic interlocutors, his fellow citizens, Glaucon and Adeimantus.

¹¹⁰ *Machē* is the marked term here: Contrast Socrates' disapproval here of *machai* among the citizens with his exhortation to Callicles to *diamachesthai* with the Athenians: *Grg.* 521a, with 513d and 447a. On the centrality of the value of *homonoia*, especially in the decades after 404, see above, 1.B.2.

While the form of discussion will remain generic dialogue, there will be no further significant resistance to Socrates' propositions; the bulk of this dialogue will be neither a Gorgianic rhetorical "feast" nor a metaphorical "battle" with the ideological notions prevalent among the Athenians. With colleagues rather than antagonists as his conversational partners, Socrates is able to engage in the positive philosophical work on moral and political issues that he largely avoids in the earlier dialogues and when facing "real" opponents.¹¹¹ The basis of that work will be the construction, through *logos*, of a polis. Thucydides and Aristophanes had variously pointed to the dangerous and hilarious consequences that might attend unconstrained "logocentric" constructionism, but Plato's prior work in redefining key elements of the critical vocabulary (notably *logos* and *sēmeion*: above, 4.C.4) has made the undertaking appear feasible.

Because the genre remains dialogue, in order to get the project off the ground, Socrates requires an appropriate foil. This is provided by Glaucon and Adeimantus' hypothetical contractarian account of the origins of society: *Hoi polloi* believe that although doing injustice is advantageous, the pain of suffering injustice outweighs the benefit. And so, for purely instrumental reasons, they make a contract (*sunthesthai*) with one another, agreeing neither to do nor to suffer injustice. From this contract flow laws and human agreements (*sunthēkai*, 358e–359a).¹¹² But the agreements are not very secure. Since the selfish ideal is still to be able to do wrong and yet avoid suffering for it, clever people will attempt to provide themselves with the resources to enable them to do just that. The key to worldly success is once again predicated on the seeming-being distinction: the successful man in this society will be the one who seems just (and so avoids punishment) and is actually unjust (and so is able to aggrandize himself at will). Along with physical strength, money, and friends, the successful wrongdoer will need to be "adequately powerful in speech so as to be able to persuade" (361b). This society will not be Hobbes' war of all-against-all; groups of skilled wrongdoers will form themselves into cooperative gangs for carrying out self-aggrandizing acts of physical violence, and they will avail themselves of "teachers of persuasion" who will provide them with facility in Assembly and courtroom address (365d). Having mastered these skills, the unjust will successfully maintain a false appearance of just behavior, and so they will flourish. In doing so, they are acting according to what is generally sup-

¹¹¹ On the key shift from book 1 to book 2, see Schofield, "Plato on the Economy," 184–86 (pointing out that the shift is both from elenchus to construction and from justice alone to a wider consideration of the nature of the polis); Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 22–23.

¹¹² Note that in Glaucon and Adeimantus' account, *hoi polloi*, as contract-makers, are conservative in just the way that John Rawls' (*Theory of Justice*, 152–57) contract-makers are when under the "veil of ignorance": they employ a "maximin" strategy that stresses avoiding possible pain rather than taking entrepreneurial risks. It is just this parsimonious conservatism, a willingness to settle for security rather than to seek grandeur, that Callicles despises in "the many." Ironically, Thucydides' Corinthians (1.70–71) and Thucydides himself in propria persona (8.96.5) regard this conservative attitude as typical of the Spartans and untypical of the pleonectic, democratic Athenians. In attributing "maximin" attitudes to "the many," Plato is once again engaged in implicit polemics with other Athenian political dissenters.

posed to be natural self-interest: “Both the many and the eminent” agree that this is the smart way to live (366b). Meanwhile the truly just man, who is made to appear unjust, will suffer the most awful tortures (361e–362a).

Much of this is strongly reminiscent of the arguments made by Polus and Callicles in the *Gorgias*, but the key difference is that, as advocates of injustice, Glaucon and Adeimantus are overtly insincere (358a). They make the argument for injustice expressly so that Socrates will construct a counterargument for justice as a desirable end in itself rather than (as *hoi polloi* supposed it to be) desirable only as an instrumental means to an end. Socrates had repeatedly demanded sincerity of his interlocutors in the *Gorgias* (e.g., 516c). But here he is amazed (and apparently delighted) with the brothers’ “divine” (*theion*) ability to make such a convincing case for injustice and yet remain unpersuaded by it (368a). The contrast with Callicles, whose praise of the powerful as excellent had been both sincere and clear evidence of an ideologized condition, is stark. Glaucon and Adeimantus evidently already possess resources that allow them to resist the hegemonic tendencies of the assumptions that are common, not only to the many, but also to most of the educated and the eminent. Socrates does not say what those resources might be, other than the offhand suggestion that they may be divine in origin—which of course recalls his own error-preventing “divine sign.” In any event, even if they are not completely free of ideological influence, Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus are evidently capable of resisting its worst effects and temptations, and so they constitute an interpretive community that may indeed be able to “practice virtue in common” (*Grg.* 527d)—or at least may prove capable of working out the preconditions for such a practice.¹¹³

Socrates suggests that the investigators begin by assuming that they are not terribly accomplished (*deinoi*). When searching for justice in the polis and in the individual human soul, they should look first at the polis because, being bigger, it will contain more justice, and so justice will be more perceptible. Only afterward will they investigate the smaller human soul, since “if we could observe a polis coming into being through *logos*,” we would see more easily what we are looking for.¹¹⁴ And so, “it is resolved that it is necessary to try to carry it out” (*dokei . . . chrēnai epicheirēsai perainein*). Although “I suppose that it is no small *ergon*” (368c –369b), “let us construct a polis from the beginning, through *logos*” (369c). Once again, the language recalls the enactment formula of the Assembly.¹¹⁵ Socrates and his small group of friends propose

¹¹³ Reeve (*Philosopher-Kings*, 23) notes the shift from Socrates’ earlier requirement that interlocutors state their own beliefs and (41) suggests that the key distinction between the other interlocutors and Glaucon and Adeimantus is that the latter “are familiar with and sympathetic to the theory of forms . . . they are philosophic men.”

¹¹⁴ Cf. Schofield (“Plato on the Economy,” 183 –84) who describes the analogy as a joke and argues persuasively that the *Republic* is indeed at least as much about the polis as it is about the soul.

¹¹⁵ The language of Athenian political culture recurs throughout the dialogue: e.g., 346c–347d (*misthos* for government service), 350e (*dēmēgorein*), 380c (I am your *sumpsēphos* regarding this law), 383c (*choros ou dōsomen*), 405a–c, 409a–d (*dikastai, dikastēria*), 419a (Socrates’ *apologia*), 432a (*homonoia* between classes in a polis), 450a (language of voting and decree; with Strauss,

undertaking, at night and in the private and secluded realm of Cephalus' house, a speech act that mimics in form the illocutionary performance that the mass Assembly of citizens regularly undertook in daylight and in public. They will be fulfilling the role of founders (*oikistai*, 379a) and lawgivers (*nomothetai*, 530c; cf. 497d), but the act that legitimates their position is a decree. As we have seen, Thucydides and Aristophanes had each explored the pitfalls of believing that it was possible to create a great *ergon* through *logos*. Once again, without necessarily assuming any directly intertextual relationship, it seems clear that Plato is deliberately challenging assumptions prevalent within the Athenian critical community. The private and nocturnal setting of the dialogue might seem to emphasize the reader's sense that the discussants were doing something quasi-illicit (at least in the eyes of other "reasonable men") by invoking a potentially corrupting power in the arrogant belief that it could be made to serve good ends.¹¹⁶

Socrates follows Callicles and Glaucon in positing an original social contract. The polis first comes into being because no one is truly autarkic; each self-interested individual requires cooperative association with many others in order to fulfill his needs and desires (369b–c). This is straightforward enough, but Socrates adds a vital stipulation to the founding premise of his original community (*koinōnia*): since each individual does only one thing well, functional specialization is essential (369e–370c, 374a–d). The significance of this supplement is immediately apparent: since some persons will be mentally ill-equipped (through inadequate *dianoia*) relative to others, specialization will lead to a political and social hierarchy with unreasoning wage-earners (*misthōtoi*) at the base (371e). Thus, in Socrates' city, to be unequal in any one important respect was to be absolutely unequal. The hierarchy-supporting principle of "one person/one function" is thus slipped into the very foundation of Socrates' "logopolis" –at the beginning (*archē*), "the greatest part of any enterprise" (377a). It is a principle that will do a great deal of work as the polis is elaborated.¹¹⁷

It is also a principle that renders an Athenian-style democracy impossible ab initio. Direct democracy was predicated on the simple assumption that the ordinary citizen could and regularly would fulfill a wide variety of political and social roles; that social unequals could and would function as political equals. Thus, an Athenian shoemaker could be, in the course of his life, a hoplite

City, 115–16), 580b–c (call for a herald). At 463a–b, the standard governmental language of democracy is contrasted to the proper governmental language to be used in logopolis.

¹¹⁶ On the private nature of the gathering, see Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy*, 102.

¹¹⁷ Reeve (*Philosopher-Kings* 172–77) discusses what he calls the "unique aptitude doctrine" and the "principle of specialization," noting the speed with which these move from simple descriptions to prescriptions, and he attempts (ultimately in vain, 175) to show that Plato did not actually subscribe to these quite unpalatable doctrines. Paul Cartledge (personal communication) suggests that the principle is borrowed from Spartan practice. I use the term "logopolis" for Socrates' polis as a convenient label (for which there is no actual textual warrant) for the just city as it is being constructed—once it is complete, it may be called "Kallipolis," a term that Plato's Socrates does in fact employ (527c).

infantryman, juror, councilman (including *prutanis* and, depending on the luck of the draw, perhaps *epistatēs*), Assemblyman, archon, voluntary public prosecutor, and so on. Although each of these various roles demanded a certain level of intellectual ability, the shoemaker would not be expected to prove competence or to demonstrate that he had any special training before taking one on. In each case, he assumed the role either of his own volition or through success in a lottery. If he were ambitious, he might furthermore attempt to address the Assembly as a *rhētōr*, or stand for election as general. In these cases, his ability to speak clearly and to the point or to lead in battle would be subject to the collective judgment of his fellow citizens. But neither his career as a shoemaker, nor his accomplishments in various other public offices, would ipso facto disqualify him. A society in which every shoemaker just made shoes, and was prevented by custom or law from doing anything else for the common good, could quite obviously not be a democracy in the Athenian sense. Plato's deep and oft-expressed conviction that politics was a specialized *technē* and that democracy erred in turning affairs over to non-specialists suggests that excluding democracy is not an accidental side-effect of Socrates' foundational move. Logopolis is designed from the beginning as the antithesis of the polis outside Cephalus' door, the one most characterized by the rule of shoemakers.

Logopolis quickly outgrows the small, healthy, "First Polis" stage, but only because Socrates rather indulgently allows Glaucon, who does not want to eat coarse food or lie on the ground and so indignantly calls the First Polis a "city of pigs," to add items of luxury (372d–373c). With luxury and possessions comes danger from the pleonectic tendencies of other men, and so an army will be required for defense (373d–e). Since the doctrine of specialization of function forbids using part-time soldiers, this leads logically to the formation of the guards (*phulakes*) as a military caste. But there is a problem in that these people (eventually to include both men and women, and frequently equated with fierce dogs) will enjoy a monopoly on organized force. Given what has come before, the issue is how to prevent the military caste from indulging what most people suppose is a natural tendency to *pleonexia* at the expense of the vulnerable economically productive classes of the polis, an indulgence that would lead to *stasis* and thereby ruin the polis. The answer is found in pedagogy: the guards must be specially trained so as to prevent them from using their power unjustly. An inevitable product of the doctrine of functional specialization, the laws regarding education are among the most structurally important and most overtly antidemocratic aspects of logopolis.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ It is notable that the impetus to the entire Kallipolis project is a desire for luxury goods (including tasty food: Davidson, "*Opsophagia*," 207; cf. Levine, "Acorns and Primitive Life") and the consequent need to defend those goods from others who also desire them: the city of pigs would not entail guards, education, or (I suppose) philosophers. Reeve (*Philosopher-Kings*, 176–78) argues that the First Polis is incorporated into Kallipolis as the society of the (subguard) producers. But this ignores a key distinction: The First Polis is autarkic; its residents provide only for their own limited desires. Kallipolis' productive classes (like Sparta's helots) must support by their labor

D.3. Obedience Training: The Education of the Guards

Central to Socratic pedagogy in the *Republic* is a strict policy of censorship. Censorship is established on the grounds that human behavior is largely a product of the stories (*logoi*) to which people are exposed; souls allowed to come into contact with false doctrine can never be rightly formed (376c–77c). Stories provide models for imitation (*mimēsis*), which is always a potentially dangerous thing (397d), but mimicry of the behavior described in immoral stories is necessarily corrupting.¹¹⁹ The lawgivers are therefore deeply concerned with discourse and ideology; the necessity of censorship is discussed at length in books 2 and 3, and again in book 10. Poetry, the primary source of bad *logoi*, corrupts because it teaches that injustice is instrumentally effective (392a–b), that change (*metabolē*) is natural and desirable (388e), and that disobedience to established authority is possible (389d–390a). Poetry is especially destructive in that it presents multiple aspects of situations (rather than a single unitary truth). Thus it contributes to the formation of multiple opinions (both in the polis and in a single human mind), and therefore it promotes *stasis*, which interferes with accomplishing deeds (*praxeis*, 603c–d). Once again, the focus is on the avoidance of discord that leads to debilitating struggle (and we are again reminded of Thucydides' Pericles); the contrast with Socrates' gadfly role in the polis-as-it-is could hardly be more stark. In Athens, Socrates does battle with his fellow citizens by demanding that they examine their ordinarily unquestioned assumptions; in logopolis, it is immoral to question the status quo or to encourage others to do so.

The main pedagogical goal of the lawmakers will be to exclude all *logoi* conducive to bad behavior and replace these with new *logoi* conducive to good behavior. This thoroughgoing program of censorship and positive indoctrination takes up a lot of space in the dialogue, since Socrates sees the evil influence of erroneous belief cropping up everywhere and regards contamination of the

not only themselves, but their guards and rulers; the distinction between the yeomen of the First Polis and Kallipolis' "providers of upkeep" (547c) is nontrivial. Ironically, desire for luxury does a lot of work for Plato at the beginning of the project, but having permitted the argument from luxury in order to move logopolis forward out of the First Polis stage and so get the guards (and thus a need for an elaborate educational system) in place, Plato's Socrates later expends a good deal of effort to expel luxury from his polis (e.g., 399e, 421d–422a). The specialization of function doctrine completes the work of getting the project off the ground. By contrast, democratic Athens did not require specialized moral education for its soldiers because the armed forces and the native adult male population were (roughly speaking) one and the same; see below, 6.B.1. On the First Polis, and the weakness of Glaucon's objections to it, see Strauss, *City*, 95–96, 104.

¹¹⁹ The point is that reasoned human action should always be the product of rational deliberation; the behavior of the rational person will be predicated either on reasoning forward from Forms or (wanting resources to achieve that high standard) on the unrefuted positions developed in the course of dialectical conversation. Given these standards, blind admiration of a model and subsequent imitation (even of an excellent model) is a very inferior basis for action. These standards in turn provide a basis for Plato's critique of alternative forms of Greek higher education, which are heavily based on imitation of excellent models (e.g., model speeches in the rhetorical schools); see Cole, *Origins*.

guards' souls as an omnipresent danger. The contrast with Athens, which in the *Gorgias* Socrates had described to Polus as characterized by the greatest degree of frank speech (*parrhēsia*) in all Greece (461e), is unavoidable.¹²⁰ As if to underline the point of logopolis as an anti-Athens, Socrates decrees that knowledge of the awful things mentioned in Hesiod's poetry (conflicts among the gods) will be restricted to the very few. The instrument of exclusion will be requiring initiates into these "mysteries" to perform a "great and difficult" sacrifice—rather than just killing a pig (378a). By initially positing for logopolis a tiny elite of means that is simultaneously an elite of knowledge, Socrates draws a clear contrast with most Athenian ritual practice (the pig sacrifice is an obvious reference to the ritual associated with initiation into the state-controlled Eleusinian Mysteries) and thereby to Athenian egalitarian ideals.¹²¹

Specifically banned, along with most of Homer and Hesiod, will be the prototypically Athenian poetic genres of tragedy and comedy. And this is explicitly because poets (especially tragic poets), who do not themselves know what is good or bad, "mimic whatever appears excellent to the many and the ignorant (*tois pollois te kai mēden eidosin*)" (602b). It is easy for the poet to imitate a childish disposition prone to anguishing over misfortune, but difficult to imitate a reasonable and quietly sound character. The latter is not easily grasped and is foreign to the festival assembly, the multifaceted (*pantodapoi*) collection of humanity in the theater (604e). Thus the poet who desires a good reputation (to be *eudokimos*) among the many imitates (i.e., presents onstage) the irritable and various (*poikilon*: a specifically democratic characteristic, as we shall see) character instead (605a). Here Plato reconnects directly with the concerns of the *Gorgias* (464c–d, 502b), in which tragedy (along with dithyramb) had been criticized as a form of flattering rhetoric. The *rhētōr* Callicles had been ventriloquized by the Athenian demos due to his desire for power and honors. We now learn that the poets—rather than being critics of popular rule in any meaningful sense—were likewise ventriloquized due to a similar desire for good reputation among the opinionated and ignorant many. No matter how sweet or how critical it may sound, then, poetry merely imitates and propagates mass ideology. And thus, poetry performed in the theater, a sub-species of rhetoric, is among the central means by which the opinions of the many are reified, instantiated, and inculcated into the souls of listeners.¹²²

¹²⁰ The contrast becomes explicit in the discussion of democracy in book 8 (555bff.); see below, 4.D.5.

¹²¹ How initiates will actually pay for the sacrifice is unclear, given the eventual plan for the elimination of monetary wealth and the communalization of the property of the guard class; but it is the contrast with Athens that is the point here. In actuality, not all Athenian sacrifices were inexpensive: Cole, "Oath Ritual," 230–32.

¹²² Cf. 595a–607e; *Laws* 3.700d–e. Drama as a subset of rhetoric: Salkever, "Tragedy and Education." See, further, Murray *Plato on Poetry* (major passages with commentary); Janaway, *Images of Excellence* (Plato's assault on poetry for its lack of access to or concern with truth); Wallace, "Poet" (Plato's concern with the influence of audience reactions on dramatic composition). Easterling ("End of an Era?") exposes as a misconception the notion that Attic tragedy went into a steep decline after the end of the fifth century.

Indeed, even “the very best among us” are at risk of being misled by poetry into imitating the unworthy character and bad behavior (605c–d). Socrates points out that he and his friends have an inbred fondness for poetry due to their upbringing (*trophē*) in (ironically) “such fine political regimes” (*politeiai*, 607e–608a). And that fondness remains a genuine danger to their souls: the contest (*agōn*) between becoming excellent or evil is a great one, indeed greater than it might seem (608b).¹²³ So until the poetry-lovers can come up with a sound counterargument in defense of poetry, Socrates and his crew will chant their own *logos* (the argument of the *Republic*) for themselves as a counterspell against falling back into an infantile infatuation (*erōs*) suitable to the many (608a).¹²⁴ Once again, we are forcefully reminded of Callicles’ corrupting *erōs* for the demos and his erroneous assumption that he, as a “real man,” will be able to break the spell cast by democratic ideology. Moreover, these passages speak directly to the problem of Socrates’ (and his friends’) own entanglement in the ideological net that was woven about them as part of their very upbringing in the democratic city. Here the quasi-mystical powers of ever-reiterated reasoned debate, the “chanting of the *logos*,” protects them from falling back into a love of poetry (and, by synecdoche, of the demotic ideology that informs tragic poetry) that threatens to corrupt their souls. The upbringing of the guards will be specifically designed to prevent the dangerous childhood contagion.¹²⁵

The self-appointed lawgivers plan to ensure not only that the guard-citizens of logopolis are freed from the deleterious effects of the stories told by Athenian tragedians, but that they are presented with an appropriate set of *logoi* in their place. It is especially important that children be told only good stories, since opinions absorbed at a tender age tend to be durable and unchangeable (378c–e). And thus a new and beneficial ideology will replace the old and corrupting one. It is certainly legitimate to describe the new *logoi* collectively as an ideology, since at least some of the stories told in logopolis are untrue: useful to the regime but literally false. The tales that are to be absorbed by the young guards will constitute a group of “noble” and “useful” lies told by the

¹²³ Here, as in Thucydides’ portrayal of the Mytilenean and Sicilian debates (above, 2.D–E), the conjoined problems of connoisseurship and rhetoric as *agōn* are to the fore, but Plato’s polis-soul analogy allows him both to generalize and to individualize the issue.

¹²⁴ *ton paidikon te kai ton tōn pollōn erōta*: the syntax as well as the sentiment forcefully recall Callicles, who suffered from an erotic ailment described as *to tōn pollōn pathos* (Grg. 513c, with 4.n.94, above). On the magical associations of rhetoric, see de Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric*; Lloyd, *Magic, Reason*; and above, 4.C.3.

¹²⁵ On the fictive nature of the “ancient struggle” that Plato establishes between philosophy and poetry, see Nightingale, *Genres*, 60–67, with literature cited. It is, however, important to remember that Thucydides (1.21.1) also rejected the accounts of the poets (along with those of *logographoi*) as incompatible with the sort of plain truth-telling he regarded as appropriate to his critical-historical enterprise. While Plato certainly takes the issue to a new level and in this sense “invents” the quarrel between poetry and philosophy, we may assume that there was some agreement within the critical community that certain types of poetry were implicated in the ideological structures of the democratic polis.

rulers to the ruled in order to keep the latter tame and docile (382c–d, 414b–415d, 459c–d). The big central lie is to be a myth of autochthony, which will lead the guards to treat the earth of their polis as their mother (414b–e). Thus far (although Socrates calls it “something Phoenician” and so links it to Boeotian rather than Athenian foundation legends), the big lie of logopolis conforms closely to official Athenian mythology. But in the democratic polis, the autochthony myth was a bulwark of essential equality: all pure-blooded Athenians were regarded as being equally noble through their common earth-born heritage, and thus individual claims to nobility were overshadowed. This myth served an important ideological function in justifying the political equality of socially unequal Athenian citizens. By contrast, Socrates’ autochthony myth, like his original social contract, focuses on inequality and thereby furnishes a fundamentally antidemocratic supplement: he establishes fictional natural and immutable distinctions among the fictionally autochthonous residents of logopolis on the basis of the different metals that are admixed into the souls of the members of each caste before birth. The gold-souled will be rulers, the silver-souled their warrior-helpers, the bronze- and iron-souled the craftsmen and farmers. Thus, in the place of the democratic myth of natural equality, the noble lie reinforces the “truth” of necessary functional specialization by establishing a rigid social and political hierarchy based on inborn and (usually, 415a–c) inherited inequality.¹²⁶

Although the rulers will regularly lie to the rest of the polis residents, the ruled must never be allowed to lie to the rulers. If they do so, they will be subject to punishment for having introduced a subversive and destructive practice into the polis; Adeimantus agrees that this must indeed be the case “if *erga* are to fulfill *logos*” (389d). Socrates has thus created an asymmetrical relationship between the rulers and the ruled in terms of access to knowledge. Rulers must never be told falsehoods because (inter alia) the knowledge by which they rule must be accurate, but the ruled will be raised from childhood on a diet of convenient lies and so will not have accurate knowledge of the world as it is. Once again, the contrast with democratic Athens is stark: the democracy rejected any fixed distinction between rulers and the ruled within the citizen body, and the decision-making processes of the council and Assembly were predicated on the citizenry having access to the most accurate information possible. Albeit, genuinely accurate information was not easy to come by or to disseminate with clarity within the competitive arena of the Assembly; this is the point of Thucydides’ critical account of the Sicilian Debate (above, 2.E). But Plato goes much further than the historian: Thucydides’ Athenian Assemblymen were likely to make mistakes, given the confusing mix of truth and falsehood to which they were exposed in public debates. But the residents of logopolis, who

¹²⁶ The ideological importance of the Athenian myth of autochthony: Ober, *Mass*, 261–66; Loraux, *Children*; Dougherty, “Democratic Contradictions.” Other forms of deception: 459a–460a. The role of lies in logopolis: Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 208–13, which splits hairs in arguing that the producer classes will not be victims of “false ideology” although their ideology is indeed “falsely sustained.”

are systematically lied to by their rulers, cannot possibly make political decisions relating to their own good or that of others. Conditioned obedience to superiors is suitable only to the subject of a sovereign, not to a responsible free citizen in the Athenian sense of the term. And thus, the guards of logopolis, although they are to be called citizens (*politai*), cannot actually be rulers over themselves or anyone else. A new class of “true guards,” the sole possessors of political authority and authoritative knowledge, will be required (412a–414b); the others will be mere auxiliaries (*epikouroi*) and helpers (*boēthoi*). It is the true-guard rulers who will promulgate the central noble myth and the other useful falsehoods (and presumably those who will be initiated into the mysteries of the full texts of Hesiod and other poets). We are well on the way to seeing the necessity for a philosopher-king.

Along with assuring specialization of function through ideological pedagogy, the lawmakers of logopolis seek to maintain an absolute distinction between the three castes (rulers, warriors, menials). The “earliest rule we established,” that each must do only the one thing that suits him by nature, when combined with the injunction to mind one’s own business and not to be a busybody, is defined by Socrates as justice (*dikaiosunē*) and the instrument (*dunamis*) by which the other virtues (*andreia*, *sophrosunē*, *sophia*) come into being (433a–b). The middle term of this statement, “minding one’s own business,” is virtually identical to Socrates’ description in the *Gorgias* of the behavior of the philosopher who is most likely to arrive at the Isles of the Blessed.¹²⁷ In discussing the *Gorgias* passage, I suggested that the quietist ideal ill-suited Socrates’ behavior in Athens as described in the *Apology*. But now Plato’s reader realizes that the problem was not with the ideal, but with the context. If Socrates in Athens plays the gadfly, he does this not by preference but out of an ethical obligation. In logopolis, where criticism is otiose, quietism is not only appropriate, but the equivalent of justice. This general rule of behavior applies with particular force to the social hierarchy of the polis: there is to be no meddling between the castes—indeed, such meddling is called the greatest of evils for a polis and the very root of injustice (434b–c). Once again, the ethical injunction actively to engage in critical struggle with one’s fellows in Athens gives way to a parallel injunction to avoid doing anything that might potentially cause social friction in logopolis.

The corollary to the absolute distinctiveness of each caste is absolute homogenization within the upper (warrior and ruler) castes. The guards (and auxiliaries) are to hold their property in common and are denied the chance of ever gaining any private property to augment this (416a–b). Moreover, in what he clearly regards as one of the most radical arguments in the dialogue, Socrates advocates and eventually discusses in elaborate detail the advantages that will accrue from the functional equality of male and female guards (again employing the argument from canine nature). Rather than grouping themselves into

¹²⁷ *Rep.* 433a: *to ta hautou prattein kai mē polupragmonein dikaiosunē esti*; *Grg.* 526c: *ta hautou praxantos kai ou polupragmonēsantos en tōi biōi*.

nuclear families, the guards will share one another (according to certain age rules) as sexual partners and act communally as parents (423e–24a, 450bff.). It is, once again, the desire for unity and consensus (*homonoia*, e.g., 432a) that provides the justification for these radical breaks with traditional Greek social arrangements. By mandating complete equality through the elimination of all strictly private pleasures and pains, indeed, by eliminating the private realm altogether, Socrates hopes to create a seamless community of interest among his guards (464c–d).

These arrangements have some obvious affinities with the revolutionary social and sexual order established by Praxagora and the Athenian women in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*. Both hypothetical societies assimilate the private to the public, and both do so out of a desire to maximize concord. Both are called into being through *logos* in a critical imitation of the Assembly's enactment procedure. Yet Aristophanes' dramatic gynococracy had proceeded by a comic extension of the egalitarian logic central to democracy: all citizens, and especially working men and women, were affected.¹²⁸ Plato's utopia is also developed in response to democracy—but as part of an effort to demonstrate that due to its simultaneous encouragement of diversity and equality within the decision-making citizen group, democracy necessarily promotes discord and *stasis*. Notably, in hyperhierarchical logopolis, it is only the leisured (i.e., economically nonproductive) guard class whose social life is to be homogenized; the “iron and bronze” folk, although possibly to be regarded as citizens in some attenuated sense, are left out of the system.¹²⁹ Aristophanes' characters, even those who accept the new regime, retain their strongly individualized personalities and opinions, while Plato's goal is the elimination of the possibility of there being more than one single, true opinion or character among the guards. In sum, logopolis, being the best governed of poleis, will also be most like a single human being (462c–e)—a vision that seems quite foreign to Praxagora and her friends and that would later be regarded by Aristotle as absurdly utopian and apolitical (below, 6.B.2). The goal of complete homogenization points to Plato's outsider position even within the Athenian critical community.

After the elimination of private property, each guard will be left “with nothing private but the body” itself, and thus there will be no need for litigation

¹²⁸ Although, as noted above, 3.D, in Praxagora's new regime the slave class is retained and expected to provide the sustenance of the citizens, and intercourse between men and slave-women is forbidden. Athens under the communal regime of the women would have become at once more egalitarian (within the native population) and more hierarchical (outside it), and so might have begun to look something like logopolis. Bloom (*Plato: “The Republic”*), in his note ad 451c (Socrates' comment that, having finished the *andreion drama*, it will be well to finish the *gunaikeion*), suggests that Plato refers directly to *Ecclesiazusae*.

¹²⁹ The status and lives of the subguard castes have led to considerable scholarly discussion; see Strauss, *City*, 113–44; Reeve, *Philosopher-Kings*, 176–78, 186–91 (on their limited access to education); Yunis, *Taming*, 164–67, which argues persuasively (with Guthrie, *History*, 4: 455–57, against Vlastos, “Theory of Social Justice” [in *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, 100–101]) that the subguard classes are not to be formally educated.

about property or relatives: no guard can improve his own material situation or harm that of another through legal means, given that there is no social space for inequality to be imposed (or equality reasserted) by the action of a court.¹³⁰ Nor will legitimate lawsuits stem from cases of assault or egregious insult. Each guard will own nothing but his or her own body, and each will be personally responsible for the care and protection of that body. In Athens, an insult or assault upon a citizen was conceived of as a public problem, because it threatened the socially constructed equality of dignity among the citizens. But in logopolis, an assault upon one guard-citizen's body by another is not an assault upon *the* citizen body, and so "a punch is just a punch."

We may recall, by way of contrast, that Demosthenes' suit against wealthy Meidias (discussed in 4.B.2, above) was precipitated by a physical insult and by Demosthenes' willingness to act on a principled conviction that personal insults by the wealthy and powerful were public offenses threatening the edifice of citizen dignity.¹³¹ In Athens, such offenses called for collective and public (rather than private and individual) remedy. In Plato's logopolis, because all citizens possess the same things (both real estate and relatives), their equal standing as citizens is commensurate with their equal standing as individuals. If there is no place for (intra-caste) inequality or (inter-caste) equality to creep in, then there is no need for democratic laws and customs to regulate equality and inequality. As long as each individual is individually responsible for the care (*epimeleia*) of his body, there is no need for the collective defense by a demos of individual citizen dignity. And thus the logic developed in Demosthenes 21 (that the demos has collective responsibility for, inter alia, defense of the individual and corporeal bodies of the weaker against assaults by the wealthy and powerful, and ergo collective *epimeleia* of the citizen body in the abstract) is meant to be irrelevant to the world of the *Republic*.¹³² Rather than litigate, each

¹³⁰ By contrast, the close association between distribution of property and kinship at Athens is evident in the corpus of private orations—especially the many cases (e.g., in Isaeus) that deal with inheritance and adoption. Who has claim to what property on the grounds of what degree of (natural or adoptive) kinship with the former or present owner is the question at issue in case after case. See, for examples, Todd, *Shape*, 201–31.

¹³¹ The issue in Demosthenes 21 is what the offended individual (i.e., Demosthenes) and the Athenian state should do about the acts of *hubris* (outrageous insult) perpetrated by a wealthy, powerful citizen against weaker citizens (in this case, Meidias punched Demosthenes in the theater of Dionysus when the latter was serving as chorus-producer). According to Demosthenes, this was not just a private matter. The wealthy orator Meidias has the character (arrogant, violent, disdainful of "inferiors") and the resources (wealth, powerful associates, rhetorical skill) that allow him to engage in wanton acts of *hubris*. The assault upon Demosthenes was, by synecdoche, an assault upon the standing of the democratic citizenry. The only remedy is the application by the citizenry of superior force, in the form of legal decision and collective action. Demosthenes (21.74–76) makes much of the advantages to the polis that accrued from his "prudent and providential" choice to bring Meidias to court and *not* to respond immediately and physically, by punching Meidias back. See 4.n.48.

¹³² What is obviously missing in Plato's account is the hypothetical case of a guard assaulting a person of inferior status; this is presumably the sort of meddling between castes that the guards'

guard will justly and honorably defend his own body when assaulted or insulted by one of his age-mates (464d–e). In the realm of perfect equals, combat remains personal and physical; it has no reason to become public and judicial.

What Plato has done here is to eliminate the *raison d'être* (the distinction between political and social equalities) of democratic public practices. Absent both “natural” intra-citizen inequality and inequality in access to the raw materials of social and political power (e.g., wealth, speaking ability, relatives), there is no call for democracy’s legal and customary equalizing functions: since no social distinctions exist between guards, there is no need for the language of the lawcourts and other democratic institutions to mediate or regulate the relations between rich and poor, high- and lowborn, clever and dull. Because each guard will look after himself or herself, lawcourts will not become showcases for the public humbling of the powerful individual who dares to commit *hubris*.

By discussing the proprieties of interpersonal conflict, Socrates also offers an indirect reply to Callicles’ rude comment to the effect that anyone who so wished could come up and punch defenseless Socrates in the face. In Athens, because he was unwilling to go to court and flatter the jury, Socrates would have to put up with the punch, consoling himself with the thought that it was no great evil to suffer harm. In logopolis, however, Socrates had the option of punching back without fear of committing an injustice. If it is hard to imagine Plato’s Socrates in a fistfight, we should remember that the Socrates of the *Apology* made a point of the physical risks he willingly took when fighting as a soldier for his polis.¹³³ As if to emphasize the contrast between the place of the collectivity and the individual in Athens and logopolis, Socrates strongly implies that those who die on military campaigns will be given individual tombs, and that these tombs are to be objects of veneration, cared for and worshiped by the other guards (468e–469b). In Athens, as Thucydides pointedly reminded his readers in the introduction to and body of Pericles’ Funeral Oration, the “ancestral custom” (*patrios nomos*) of the democratic polis denied individual distinction between its fallen soldiers and decreed their burial in collective public graves.¹³⁴

education was designed to prevent. In Athens, by contrast, the law of *hubris* (as Demosthenes 21.47–48 points out) protected citizens and noncitizens (including women, minors, and slaves) alike; cf. Fisher, *Hybris*, 36–85.

¹³³ Some commentators (e.g., P. Kahn, “Philosopher’s Death”) are troubled by Socrates’ apparently willingness to do physical harm to others by fighting as a hoplite-infantryman. It is simply not possible to imagine that Socrates could have avoided doing physical damage to his opponents (directly or indirectly) without endangering his own fellow Athenian infantrymen (and therefore harming by betraying a trust); see the account of hoplite battle in Hanson, *Western Way of War*. We must accept that Socrates can do physical damage to others without doing “harm,” given the appropriate context. In the rather different world of the *Laws* (880a–b), a citizen over age forty will be punished for fighting with (*machesthai*) another, regardless of whether he is the aggressor or acting in self-defense.

¹³⁴ Thucydides’ Pericles uses the anonymity of the Athenian soldiers as the foundation for his verbal monument to Athenian greatness; again, the contrast between the critical strategies of the

In logopolis, internal unity was assured as long as the guard-citizens enjoyed a perfect equality of access to resources, information, education, and character. By contrast to consensual logopolis, the existing poleis of Greece are regarded by Socrates as being in a chronic state of *stasis*. Indeed, the presence of inequality (especially of wealth) among the citizens in other poleis meant that logopolis was really the *only* polis worthy of the name. Every other polis was actually two or more poleis inhabiting a single territory; most notably, the rich (*plousioi*) and poor (*penētes*) were everywhere perennial enemies and more than willing to turn against one another if encouraged to do so by a foreign power (422d–423a, cf. 551d)—once again there seems to be an implied reference to Thucydides' historical account (especially to the long passage on *stasis* at Corcyra) and an implied criticism of the historian's failure to offer a solution to the problem of economic class interests and *stasis*.

Socrates continues: When not actually engaged in civil war, the existing poleis are marked by the corrupting influence of flattery between classes, especially rich and poor (465c). Unlike logopolis, in which the fundamental principles established by lawgivers will suffice (425b–e), these other regimes attempt to regulate their affairs through a plethora of detailed laws. Yet ironically, while these regimes pass laws threatening death to those who change the constitution, they lavish praise and honors on anyone who gratifies the citizens by learning their desires in advance and then offering to fulfill them (426b–c). To this, Adeimantus indignantly adds that he despises so-called leaders who are deceived into supposing themselves to be true politicians (*politikoi*) just because they are praised by the many. But Socrates reminds his interlocutor that a man ignorant of measurement, if he were told by the many that he was four cubits tall, would be likely to believe it (426d–e).¹³⁵ As in the *Gorgias*, the corruption of existing poleis is associated with relationships of reciprocal gratitude (*charis*), and the blame is ultimately laid at the door of the hegemonic belief system of the many. The behavior of the deluded self-styled leaders is an effect, not a cause, and the sympathetic reader understands better than ever why Themistocles and Pericles (inter alios) were unable to improve Athens.

The situation in logopolis is meant to be very different, but the discussion of the noncausal relationship between constitutional law and political practice demonstrates that good laws are not enough; the founders of logopolis need to think seriously about rulership. Socrates and his colleagues had set themselves up as lawgivers, and as such they had established the legal basis from which a good society might grow up organically. But they now acknowledge what the Athenians themselves at least occasionally recognized (e.g., Dem. 21.223–25),

two writers is pointed, and one is tempted to suppose that it is deliberate on Plato's part. Cf. Clairmont, *Patrios Nomos*; Pritchett, *Greek State at War*, 4: 106–20.

¹³⁵ The suggestion that measurement of quantity, ordinarily thought of as a matter of "brute fact," may, under certain circumstances, be subject to ideological pressure, is reminiscent of the confrontation between brute and social facts in Aristophanes *Eccl.*, as well as George Orwell's dystopic world of *Nineteen Eighty-four*, where (for *hoi polloi* if not for military engineers) "2 + 2 = 5."

that a code of law is, in and of itself, without agency. Good laws are useful as a ground, but it is how the law is employed and interpreted by human agents that determines the character of the *politeia*. Even if the lawmakers establish the best possible laws, the polis will drift away from what the founders had intended unless those responsible for implementing the laws remain true to their original spirit.¹³⁶ What, then, is to be done about the day-to-day work of interpretation and implementation? Who will rule logopolis?

D.4. From logos to ergon: Philosopher-Rulers

The problem of leadership has already arisen in the shift from the relatively numerous guards as designated rulers to a much more restricted cadre of “true guards” (and the consequent demotion of the former to the status of auxiliaries). The justification for reducing the number of actual rulers (i.e., separating the military function from the governing function) is that political knowledge is found among very few people; indeed, the group of people who are wise in this sense is the very smallest by nature (428c–429a). The conversation now returns to the polis-soul analogy originally sketched out in book 2, an analogy that allows Plato to address a key political concern that was common to Thucydides, Aristophanes, and the rest of the critical community: How to fuse the diverse interests present in the polis into a single, unitary will? Plato’s answer in the *Republic* emerges from his central polis/soul analogy: Just as the best-governed polis is to be most homogeneous and so most like a single person, so, too, the true ruler must possess the most fully unified and least conflicted soul. Very few people, only the best by nature and the best educated, possess such internal unity; most people are plagued with mixed desires (*pantodapai epithumiai*): For Plato, it is especially children, women, slaves, who fall into this latter category—along with most so-called free men—that is, “the many and the lowly” (431b–c). Thus it is clear that logopolis, if it is to be the best polis and ruled by the politically wise, will be ruled by either a very few people or a single person (e.g., 445d).¹³⁷

The rulership problem points to the slippage between *logos* and *ergon*, between the conversation being carried on in the hermetic society of those gathered beneath Cephalus’ roof and the world outside. So far, the conversation has taken the form of a thought experiment, intended to allow Socrates and his

¹³⁶ This is the key problem of Plato’s late work, the *Laws*, in which he abandons the hope of the rule of philosophers. Yunis (*Taming*, 211–36) suggests that, lacking completely reliable rulers, the Plato of the *Laws* is required to employ entrenchment clauses (on which see also Boegehold, “Resistance,” 208) and to give more scope to rhetoric, especially in the preambles to the laws of Magnesia. See, however, Bobonich, “Persuasion” and “Reading” (arguing that the laws of Magnesia persuade through appeal to rationality).

¹³⁷ On the “positively minute” number of true-guard rulers, see Nightingale, *Genres*, 18. The rejection by Plato’s Socrates of a relatively large number of warriors as rulers recalls Thucydides’ description (8.92.11) of the thinking of Athenian oligarchs who (after the coup of 411 B.C.) regarded the rule of “the Five Thousand” (i.e., the hoplite class of Athens) as unacceptable on the grounds that having so many participate in ruling would be tantamount to democracy.

friends to discuss the problem of justice in relatively nonideologized terms. Creating a verbal code of general law will only bring into being a genuine new *politeia* and polis if the foundational speech act is felicitous and if the perlocutionary behavior of actual people changes accordingly. This gap between what is said and what actually is (or might come to be) has been ignored for the better part of the dialogue, in order to gain a satisfactory notion of logopolis in theory. But now, having decided that logopolis is indeed desirable, the problem of the speech/reality slippage returns in full force. Socrates designates this slippage as the “third wave”: the largest and most difficult problem the company has yet faced (472a). Socrates’ first move when faced with the third wave seems to be a retreat from the original project, which had been “to create a polis, from the beginning, in speech” (369c). He now cites the analogy of an artist who has painted an idealizing picture of a man: we don’t blame the artist if he can’t actually prove that the man exists. So, too, for us, who “have made a verbal model (*paradeigma*) of a good polis.” Surely what we say is no less worthy, even if we can’t show that it is possible actually to bring into being the polis we have described (472d–e). Indeed, perhaps nothing can ever be done just as it is said (*prachthēnai hōs legetai*), perhaps the very nature (*phusis*) of action (*praxis*) is to attain to less truth (*alētheia*) than speech—even if it does not seem (*dokei*) that way to somebody. And so Glaucon must not compel Socrates to represent the polis, which has been coming into being according to *logos* as an actual *ergon* (473a).

This turn in the argument will seem very unsatisfactory to any reader interested in practicing virtue in common as a preparation for engaging in politics—the problem Socrates left us with at the end of the *Gorgias*. We seem to be at risk of being left at the aporetic point at which other promising critical projects had abruptly terminated. If there is a necessary and natural disjunction between *logos* and *ergon*, why go through all the rigmarole of imagining an ideal polis in such detail? Must we after all take seriously Socrates’ claim that the erection of a “big” experimental polis was only a visual aid to allow the myopic to “see” justice in the “little” human soul more easily? Socrates seemingly acknowledges these discontents by returning to the issue of rulership and enunciating what is probably the most famous proposition in the *Republic*: noting that his suggestion may provoke laughter, he posits that in order for a polis that would approximate the excellence of logopolis to come into being, either philosophers must be kings or kings and oligarchs (*dunastai*) must truly philosophize.¹³⁸ Instrumental political power (*dunamis* . . . *politikē*) and philosophy must be conjoined. The many dispositions that are strongly attached to either ruling or philosophy, yet unwilling to engage in both, must be excluded. Absent these stringent conditions, there will be no earthly just polis and no rest from ills for the human race (473c–e). Notably, Socrates mentions as potential phi-

¹³⁸ The issue of comments likely to provoke laughter, and when laughter is and is not an appropriate response, is a recurring theme in the *Republic*. See Halliwell, *Plato: “Republic”* 5, 137, with passages cited, and cf. above, 4.C.2. The issue is obviously important in terms of Plato’s relationship to the critical genre of comedy; cf. above, 4.n.88.

losopher-rulers only the first two of the three canonical (in Greek political writing) ruler options: one (monarch), few (oligarchs), many (demos).¹³⁹ His prior comments regarding the rareness of souls suitable for advancement to “true-guard” status has effectively eliminated the possibility of a “philosopher-demos.”

Glaucon underlines the momentous nature of this pronouncement by claiming that “many distinguished people” (*pollous te kai ou phaulous*) will immediately grab up arms in order to attack Socrates’ claim that philosophers must rule, so Socrates had better be able to “defend himself by *logos*.” Failing that, he must “pay the penalty” of being mocked for his views (473e–474a). Glaucon’s reference to a defense and a penalty recalls the pseudo-trial of the Thrasymachus interchange, while the reiterated references to those who may laugh at Socrates if he fails in his self-defense anticipates the conclusion to the Allegory of the Cave (he who “returns to the cave” risks being laughed at and killed, 517a) and recalls the conversation with Polus in the *Gorgias* (above, C.2). In replying to Polus, Socrates had alluded to being laughed at by both Polus and the Athenian demos. But Glaucon is uninterested in the demos, predicting that it is “distinguished people” who will object to Socrates’ proposition. He has, in effect, challenged Socrates to defend his political idea within the educated elite of the critical community.¹⁴⁰

Socrates begins his defense by reference to the theory of Forms (*ideai*, 476c–480a).¹⁴¹ Philosophical knowledge (*epistēmē*) of a single, unitary, and beautiful truth is the antithesis of raw ignorance (*amathia*). In the gray area between the two resides the instrumentality (*dunamis*, 477b) of opinion (*doxa*). Opinion is not invariably wrong and evil, but it has no way of separating error from truth (i.e., what seems to be from what is) because it has no access to the eternal and changeless Forms. And thus the customary practices (*nomima*) of the many regarding what is beautiful and true simply “roll around” between pure being and not-being (479d). Government by such people will obviously be hit-and-miss at best. Here, Socrates seems to be very close to Thucydides’ position on the likelihood of policy error given the mix of truth and falsehood in the opinions upon which the decision processes of democratic government were predicated. But the theory of Forms allows Socrates to take the next step, to posit a solution to what Thucydides—along with other members of the critical community—could only expose as an endemic problem. Philosophers need not rely on unstable opinion once they have grasped the unchanging Forms. Since the knowledge of such philosophers is both stable and real, it is they, and they

¹³⁹ Canonical three types of rulership: Pind. *Pyth.* 2.86–88; Hdt. 3.80–82.

¹⁴⁰ The Socrates of the *Republic* is emphatically not a simple *philotimos*: i.e., one who will court the small and lowly (*phauloi*), if he cannot be honored by the great and worthy (475a–b).

¹⁴¹ On development of the theory of Forms (which probably preceded the writing of the *Republic*), see Jordan, *Plato’s Arguments*. The question of the original date and purpose of Plato’s development of the doctrine of Forms is mostly irrelevant to my argument; the point is that bringing the Forms into the political discussion of the *Republic* allows Plato to solve (inter alia) the long-standing problem of how to establish a legitimate yet nondemocratic political authority.

alone, who are suited to rule (484a–b, 487e)—this is in accord with the important principle, first established in the discussion with Thrasymachus, that justice (and so true rulership) must be a function of secure knowledge.

Plato's Socrates has seemingly found the critical grail: he has described the basis of a government that could claim to be at once just and nondemocratic. But before he can claim to have won the contest and thereby reap the praise and avoid the mockery of "the distinguished," he must still confront the issue of realia: If philosopher-rulers are the answer to the "problem of democracy," why do philosophers not rule in any existing polis? The by-now-familiar answer is the awesome hegemonic power of popular ideology. Realizing logopolis requires the participation of those suited by disposition to both philosophy and rulership. Demotic ideological hegemony tends, however, to corrupt young people with political ambitions—even those with a naturally philosophical character—and to turn the best of them into servile politicians. Even the demos tended to underestimate its own strength in this regard. Adeimantus must not suppose, as do the many, that it is certain "private sophists" who destroy the youth. Rather, it is those who say these things (the many) who are themselves the "great Sophists" who "educate most completely" and mold the young and the old, men and women alike, making them just as they wish (*boulontai*) them to be (492a–b). Adeimantus wonders when it is that this education takes place. Socrates replies that it is

when many gathered together sit down in assemblies, courts, theaters, army camps, or any other common meeting of the multitude (*plēthos*), and, with a great deal of uproar (*thorubos*), excessively blame some of the things said or done and just as excessively praise others, shouting and clapping; and, besides, the rocks and the very place that surrounds them echo and redouble the uproar of blame and praise. Now in such circumstances, as the saying goes, what do you suppose is the state of the young man's heart? Or what kind of private education will hold out for him and will not be swept away by such blame and praise and go, borne by the flood, wherever it's headed so that he'll say the same things are noble and shameful as they do, practice what they practice, and be such as they are? (492b–d)

The reader of the *Gorgias* will recognize this scene—with its focus on praise, blame, and a habit of imitation that ends in identity—as describing the "courtship ritual" that corrupted Callicles.

The ideological constraint drummed into the young in the public assemblies is reinforced by practice, since he who is not persuaded by the clamor of the mob to conform is inflicted by them with punishments: disenfranchisement, fines, and death (492d). No mere sophist or private conversation can hope to prevail (*kratēsein*) against these forces. And so no human *ēthos*, however educated, can, or has, or shall prevail against this sort of public *paideia* (492e). Indeed, the so-called sophists themselves, who are popularly thought to be the rivals of the masses (because they supposedly threaten the rule of the demos by teaching special skills to elites), in fact teach nothing but the opinions (*dogmata*) of the many—the very things that the many proclaim (*doxazousin*) when

they are gathered together in Assembly. The sophists call what they teach wisdom (*sophia*). But it is nothing more than the “wisdom” that is learned and might be transmitted by the keeper of a great and ferocious beast. The keeper is quickly trained to cater to the beast’s needs by its infernal bellowing and its response to different sorts of speech. In the end, through a sort of Pavlovian behavioral conditioning, he will learn to provide the beast with whatever it wants. Having been well trained in this fashion, the keeper, although self-evidently the beast’s servant, then claims to have mastered (and to be able to teach others) the secrets of beast-management (493a–b). Moreover, the basic point can be extended: the painter, poet, and politician—like the sophist—merely learn to accommodate themselves to the angers and pleasures of “the many and various forgathered folk.” Each takes the many as his master, and of necessity produces what they praise (493c–d).¹⁴²

To the reader of the *Gorgias*, this may seem at first glance to be entirely familiar terrain. But there are two important differences. First, the argument has now been generalized. The *Gorgias* gave the impression that Callicles’ corruption and ventriloquization by the Athenian demos stemmed primarily from his intense desire to gain power and prestige as a democratic politician. This left open the possibility that a quietist who did not desire to gain political influence might not be subject to the dangerous *erōs* to which Callicles had fallen prey. Living a strictly private life by “minding one’s own business” seemed a viable option. The reader now sees how difficult that will be. She learns that, although the lure of political activism is an added danger and temptation to be confronted by the philosophically inclined (494b–e), the “education” offered by the assembled masses is impressed on virtually every resident of the polis: not only on politicians and sophists, but on other artisans, and ultimately on “the young and the old, men and women.” Ideological hegemony is not, therefore, just a tool that serves to control a specific (and, from a democrat’s point of view, potentially dangerous) sector of elite society by playing on the hopes and fears of the ambitious. Far from it: the “education” that flows from the operations of mass culture captures just about everyone.

The second main divergence from the treatment of ideology offered in the *Gorgias* is that, by the time the reader has arrived at the exposition of the power of ideology in the sixth book of the *Republic*, a full-scale alternative theory of politics has been developed through the verbal construction of an experimental model of a polis. The significance of this is soon apparent. Socrates points out that because the masses cannot grasp the singular good, the *plēthos* cannot be philosophical. Unable to understand philosophy, the masses will cast blame upon it, and that chorus of accusation will be picked up by the individuals who consort with the *plēthos* and desire to please it (494a). Thus (as the symmetrical argument of the *Gorgias* had led us to suppose) the demos is a danger to philosophy because its well-trained minions threaten philosophers. We now under-

¹⁴² This extended passage is of considerable importance in assessing Plato’s relationship to democracy; see, e.g., Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy*, 88–89; Yunis, *Taming*, 149.

stand why it is “the distinguished” rather than the masses who will “take up arms” against Socrates’ philosopher–ruler proposition: as Socrates’ earlier indictment of the poets had hinted, most of the critical community is implicated along with Callicles and the politicians as ideologized pawns of the true “great Sophists” –the many.

In this circumstance, a person who happens, through some accident of nature or culture, to be one of the few who are able to embrace philosophy, one who has seen through “the madness of the many,” certainly will choose to “keep quiet and mind his own business” (496b). Yet the reader has already sensed how very difficult it will be to maintain a quiet life. Moreover, when Adeimantus points out that such a person, having lived without committing injustice or impiety and having died with fair hope, has not accomplished “the least of things,” Socrates replies, “But not the greatest either (*oude . . . ta megista*), if he did not happen to find a suitable *politeia*. For in a suitable one, he himself will expand his capacity (*autos te mallon auxēsetai*) in that he will preserve communal as well as private affairs (*meta tōn idiōn ta koina sōsei*)” (497a).

Here, at last, Socratic *politikē technē* seems to be explained. The tension between the ethical ideals of the activist public gadfly who endangers himself to help his polis and its residents, and the philosophical quietist who neither does nor suffers harm but seeks only to improve his own soul, seems to be resolved. Given the premises of the Socrates of the *Republic*, quietism and concentration on the “private affairs” of individual soul-improvement are the most rational (albeit difficult) responses to the mad world of the polis-as-it-is, the realm dominated by the masses and their opinions. But a man who lives only for himself, taking care of his own soul, minding only his own private business, and ignoring the realm of communal interaction, fails to achieve his fullest capacity. His full potential to do good, for himself and for others, can only be achieved through a sort of “political” activism. This activism, however, becomes rational only in the context of a suitable regime—that is, one in which he will be a ruler rather than a (potential) victim. The creation of the polis in *logos* (497b–d) is therefore the precondition for living the best and fullest of human lives. By the same token, given the inherent tendency to *stasis* of all current polis-regimes, the rule of philosophers is the precondition of a long-lasting just polis. A code of good laws proved inadequate, in and of itself, for a living regime, since “there would always have to be present in the polis something [i.e., some living human reason] possessing the same understanding of the *politeia*” as that of the lawgivers (497c–d). Ruler and city are codependent: if the philosopher requires the polis to achieve his highest aspirations, so, too, the polis requires the philosopher to achieve its completion (*telos*, 499b–c).

At this key moment in the dialogue, the sympathetic reader is offered reason to hope that aspiring to living in a just polis is more than a utopianian aspiration: Socrates is at pains to show that, while difficult to achieve, the rule of the philosopher-king was not impossible (*ou gar adunatos genesthai*, 499c–502c). Those whom Glaucon had imagined rushing at Socrates with weapons drawn (the educated elite qua critical community) will be forced to admit the logical

force of the argument for philosophical rule (501c). Even the masses—to whom Socrates suddenly ascribes a heretofore unimaginably high degree of both educability and benevolence—could come to accept such a regime, if they could just be taught what a real philosopher was like (499d–500b).¹⁴³

The grounds for public suspicions about philosophy seem suddenly to have shifted. Rather than an innate distrust by the many of what they cannot understand, which leads their trained minions to threaten the philosophers, Socrates now suggests that it is the activity of false philosophers that brings philosophy into disrepute and blocks the public acceptance of what would otherwise be the most natural of regimes. A bit further on in the dialogue, we learn more about the origins of these pseudo-philosopher marplots. They are people who study dialectic despite not having the right character for it, and those who learned elenctic argumentation by imitating the technique after it had been practiced on them. Absorbing half-baked philosophy poisons the mind in that it destroys established systems of belief; without finding their way to the truth, the “puppy” dialecticians learn to despise as illogical the ancestral ways (*ta patria*). And so, lacking the benefit of either conventional assumptions or eternally true principles by which to guide the conduct of their lives, they become outlaws. It is because of these pretenders’ misdeeds that philosophy as a whole becomes an object of slander among the rest of mankind (537d–539d).

What is quite remarkably missing here is the hegemonic principle that had been featured so prominently just a short time before. Abandoning the strong claim that no human *ēthos*, however educated, will ever prevail against popular ideology (492e), Socrates now assumes that persuading the masses to place themselves under the rule of philosophers is a matter of house-training a few aberrant would-be dialecticians and distinguishing them from real philosophers in the popular imagination. Once the masses realize that philosophers are knowledgeable, good, and just, they will come to accept them as leaders.

The potential depth of popular trust in true philosopher-leaders is suggested at the end of book 7. In order for the transition from the old, corrupt regime to a new and good regime to be accomplished most easily and quickly within an existing polis, the philosopher-rulers will banish all citizens over age ten to outlying agricultural districts. The young children, now under the new rulers’ direct care and separated from the corrupting influence of their parents, will then be taught the new ways and laws (540e–541a). Since it is inconceivable that unjust force would be used by philosophers, we must suppose that the great bellowing beast has suddenly become very tame indeed—a rationally self-interested entity capable of recognizing the great advantages that will accrue from

¹⁴³ The question of whether Plato imagined Kallipolis as practically achievable is the subject of a recent debate, sparked by a review of the thought of Leo Strauss (who denied that Kallipolis was ever intended as a workable polis—see next note) by M. Burnyeat (“Sphinx Without a Secret”), contending that Kallipolis was intended by Plato to be both utopian and practical. The sudden shift to a tame and educable demos (on which, see Yunis, *Taming*, 167–71) surely demonstrates that Plato was interested in exploring the possibility of moving from text to political practice; it is less clear that his thought experiment answered the question decisively.

voluntarily putting its young under the absolute control of a philosophical class. The parents are evidently sufficiently clear-headed to recognize that they are so helplessly ill-educated as to constitute a moral danger to their children and their community, and so they accept exile to the fields. The older generation thereby willingly gives up its urban possessions and its own future as preconditions to the therapeutic extermination of its corrupted beliefs and practices. This willingness to abandon any hope of personal material flourishing or cultural reproduction (in any ordinary sense of the concept) seems incredible in light of Plato's earlier comments about the extent of popular ignorance, selfishness, and ineducability.¹⁴⁴ Thucydides had offered his readers a reasoned argument, based on the rhetorical power and established record of a highly skilled and trusted public speaker, to explain Pericles' remarkable feat in persuading the rural Athenians temporarily to abandon their homes, goods, and ancestral shrines in the Attic countryside at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. The sacrifice Plato's philosopher-rulers ask of their citizens is much greater, but Plato's reader is given no explanation—other than the presumed hyperrationality of the over-age-ten citizens—as to how or why their agreement will be secured.

There is no very obvious way, at least within the logic of the dialogue, to resolve the apparent contradiction between the educable and the ineducable demos. This might be taken as evidence of Plato's failure to solve the problem of moving from enactment to practice, from felicitous *logos* to *ergon*—a failure that would not have surprised Ps.-Xenophon, Aristophanes, or Thucydides.¹⁴⁵ The Socrates of the *Apology* had dealt with the issue by uniting the *logos* of his elenchus with the *ergon* of his long critical struggle with the Athenians, and eventually this union of argument and practice had cost him his life. Avoiding the historical Socrates' fate meant quietism, but a life wrapped up in *logos* and detached from *erga* still seemed woefully incomplete. Plato needed the concept of democratic hegemony to explain the tragedy of 399 as the inevitable outcome of Socrates' ethical commitment to struggle. Yet at the same time, he

¹⁴⁴ The situation Plato envisions here finds its real-world analogue in a common pattern of Greek civil strife (described by Thucydides—e.g., in the case of Epidamnus: see above, 2.A.4): One faction takes over the main town of a polis, and the other faction retreats to strongholds in the countryside from which it launches military assaults on the town. The pattern had recently been played out in Athens, when the Thirty held the city and the democrats held the rural stronghold of Phyle (see Krentz, *Thirty*, for details). The familiar and violent analogy underlines the bizarre complacency of those “over age ten.” This passage of the *Republic* is cited by Strauss (*City*, 63, 118, 126–27) in support of his argument for the impossibility of realizing Kallipolis in the real world. Education as future-oriented social reproduction: Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 14–15, 287–88.

¹⁴⁵ Yunis (*Taming*, 172–236) points to the relatively sympathetic treatment of rhetoric in later dialogues (esp. *Phaedrus* and *Laws*) as Plato's attempt to resolve the conundrum. A complementary approach might focus on the origins and function of certain “right opinions” among the demos (highlighted in the *Gorgias*) and on the reasoning capacity of the 220 jurors who voted to acquit Socrates after his speech of defense. Notably, Socrates says these men are “rightly” called judges (*Apol.* 40a: *dikastas kalōn orthōs*); the obvious analogy is the “true guards” of Kallipolis (*Rep.* 414b: *orthotaton kalein toutous men phulakas*), but the “true judges” of Athens are strikingly (*Apol.* 36a) more numerous.

needed an educable demos in order to offer philosophical fulfillment through consensual (and *stasis*-free) leadership of a political community as a viable alternative to Socratic “gadfly ethics”: The sudden shift in the assessment of the masses given by the Socrates of the *Republic*, from all-powerful educators to readily educated pupils, points to an unresolved problem in critical ethics.

D.5. *Republic versus Apology and Crito*

The issue of education and educability brings us back to another long-standing problem in the Platonic ethics of criticism: Socrates’ own education and the relationship of his working moral and ethical premises to popular Athenian assumptions about proper behavior. The discussion in book 7, specifying in detail how the philosopher-king is to be educated, and the prominence of censorship in the education of the guards (from whose ranks the philosophers are chosen), underline the complexity of the situation. The core principle underwriting the upbringing and primary education of the young guards is the inculcation of correct belief by the exclusion of bad *logoi* and an emphasis on their good counterparts. Thus an upbringing (*trophē*) and an education (*paideia*) centered on the avoidance of ideological contamination are the essential prerequisites to the future philosopher’s progress toward perceiving the Forms. The goal of the higher education of true-guard future philosophers is the development of a form of reasoning that transcends all hypothetical grounds and therefore all belief, whether good or bad (i.e., all ideology). The philosopher-in-training is to use hypotheses (the good beliefs inculcated by his proper primary education) only as stepping-stones back to the origin (*archē*), the nowhere point at which hypotheses are superseded by the simple truth of the Forms. Once the Forms have been apprehended, it will be possible to work forward again, this time without hypotheses, to unquestionable conclusions (509e–511c, 533b–c). These certain conclusions will then be the basis of action, the political rule of the philosophers.

In the terms Plato had used in the *Gorgias*, the education-to-rulership process described in the *Republic* avoids the swamp of *empeiria*—the hit-or-miss, flat-tery-and-raw-opinion-based process by which Athenian democracy actually operated. It begins with a *technē* (a set of procedures that exist for the purpose of good ends and can both achieve those ends consistently and account for how they are achieved), and concludes in *epistēmē* (certain knowledge, based on absolute Truth, that yields unquestionable conclusions and mandatory ways of acting). This specialized education is to be closely supervised by previously enlightened rulers. It will begin virtually at birth (since that which is learned at an early age is especially tenacious, 377a–b, 378e) and will finally culminate at age fifty with the revelation of the truth of the Forms (521c–540b). At this point, the former trainee will be expected to take on a part of the burden of ruling and educating future rulers (540a–b). The Forms thus ultimately take the place of both the belief-based hypotheses employed by those who are being educated and the mere opinions (*dogmata*) on which democratic decision-mak-

ing necessarily rested. As the Allegory of the Cave (514a–17a) makes clear, reference to the Forms is the solution to the problem of democratic ideology and hegemony; once the Forms have been perceived by an individual, knowledge replaces opinion, the light of reality replaces darkness and shadows, and the hegemony of ideology over that person is ended. His duty is then to help (through providing the same rigorous education to which he was subjected) a few select others to achieve true knowledge, and to rule, by means of good (although falsely sustained) ideology (including noble lies), over the great majority to whom Truth remains inaccessible. As long as the enlightened rulers do their duty, and there is no meddling between the castes, this society should be able to replicate itself indefinitely.¹⁴⁶

The self-replicating society of logopolis may now properly be called “Kallipolis” (527c) since, with the specification of the rulers’ education and their responsibility as educators, it is complete. But we must remember that Kallipolis was not “always already” in existence; it was founded at a certain moment (in dramatic time) by a speech act performed by Socrates within the private society gathered at Cephalus’ house. Its original general laws were set down by Socrates and his two friendly interlocutors, Glaucon and Adeimantus. As we have seen, the three founding lawgivers of Kallipolis possess a rare, unexplained, untheorized, and perhaps “divine” ability to avoid the worst effects of ideological hegemony. But none of the present company has enjoyed the highly regulated “upbringing” and “education” that we have come to suppose will be necessary to create a philosopher-king. It remains unclear in the dialogue whether Socrates himself has actually grasped the Forms (see 533a) or whether we are to suppose that even without that perfect knowledge, his unique (at least in Athens) command of political *technē* is sufficient to establish the hypothetical preconditions from which someone else might gain access to true knowledge.¹⁴⁷

While the extent of Socrates’ apprehension of the Forms remains obscure, the implied comparison between his own actual upbringing and education and that of the philosopher-king seems clearly to bear on the contractarian argument made by the personified Laws of Athens in the *Crito*, and thus on the issue of “gadfly ethics.” The Laws had claimed that Socrates must either accept his own execution or break his just and voluntary contract with them. The terms of that contract had specified the exchange of his reverence for his polis and obedience to its Laws (an obedience that conduced to the polis’ preservation) for Socrates’ having received and accepted specific goods: his birth, nurture (*trophē*), and education (*paideia*, 50e). The *Republic* brings all of this (and thus the fairness of the contract) into question. In book 7, when reiterating the absolute responsibility of the philosopher-king of Kallipolis to “return to the cave” and take part in ruling the polis, Socrates allows that philosophers in “other poleis” have no responsibility to take part in public affairs:

¹⁴⁶ Although not forever. See 546a: decay is inevitable even for the ideal regime.

¹⁴⁷ On Socrates’ moral knowledge, see above, 4.n.31.

We'll say that when such men [philosophers] come to be in the other poleis, it is fitting for them not to participate (*metechousi*) in the miserable labors (*ponōn*) [of those places], for they [the philosophers] grew themselves up of their own will, and against the will of the *politeia* in each case (*automatoi gar emphuontai akousēs tēs en hekastēi politeias*). So it is just that the nature that is self-made (*to autophues*) and owes its upbringing (*trophē*) to no one (*mēdeni trophēn opheilōn*) is less than eager to repay the price of its upbringing (*tropheia*) to anyone. (520a–b)

By contrast, if the philosopher in Kallipolis shows reluctance to leave off the pleasures of pure contemplation and return to the cave, we will say to him:

But you we have caused to be born (*egennēsamen*) for your own sake and for the sake of the rest of the polis (*tēi te allēi polei*), like the leaders and kings in beehives. You have been better and more fully educated (*pepaideumenos*) and are more able to participate (*metechein*) in both activities [ruling and contemplating]. (520b)

This is very close to the contractual argument that the Laws had pressed upon Socrates in the *Crito*: because “we” are responsible for your birth, upbringing, and education, “you” owe us obedience in repayment for goods received, and because of the implied contract, you must do that which may not initially seem to you most personally choiceworthy.

After completing Plato's disquisition on the special education required to make a philosopher-king, the reader knows what a genuinely beneficial upbringing and education for a person with Socrates' innate abilities and character would be like. The *trophē* and *paideia* that Socrates actually received from the formal laws and informal customary practices (as we have seen, the *nomoi* of the *Crito* must include both) of the democratic polis were not at all similar to those prescribed for the future rulers of Kallipolis. Even supposing that his father had been constrained by Athenian custom to provide him with the rudiments of a gymnastic and “musical” education, the Socrates of the *Republic* has clearly explained that he owes nothing to the *politeia* of Athens. That *politeia* had contributed nothing positive to his upbringing properly so understood and, worse, had been “unwilling” to have him bring himself up. Moreover, the Socrates of the *Republic* has explained what the education offered by the assembled masses consisted of—and he has stated bluntly that no private education could hope to stand up to the public bombardment of ideological demotic *paideia* (492b–e). His later ironical comment, to the effect that he and his companions were predisposed to be snared by the seductive beauty of poetry since they received their *trophē* in “such fine *politeiai*” (above, 4.D.3), makes the same general point. Even the Laws' claim that it was the Athenian laws of marriage that had given Socrates life is undermined by the Myth of Er with which the *Republic* concludes, in which the soul's (re)birth is a matter of the soul's own prior actions and decisions, rather than a matter of state law or parenthood (617dff.).

If the Socrates of the *Republic* is right about the absence of appropriate *trophē* and *paideia* offered the philosopher by a nonideal regime and the hege-

monic education proffered by the mob, then the Laws of Athens in the *Crito* are liars. Their contractual argument is falsified when it is viewed from a space outside the ideological realm of democratic opinion, a space generated by the dialogical situation and the thought experiment resulting in Kallipolis. The Laws did not provide Socrates with a suitable upbringing or a good education—which casts a retrospective light on Socrates’ comment in the *Gorgias* to the effect that he and his companions suffered from *apaideusia* (527e). Indeed, the argument of the *Republic* leads us to suppose that to the extent that they were capable, the *nomoi* of Athens had corrupted Socrates’ soul (as they had the souls of all other Athenians) by attempting to inveigle him to flatter, cater to, and mimic the masses. Thus, when viewed from the heights of Kallipolis, the argument that Socrates was their “son” and “slave” appears not only false, but sinister. Had Socrates been educated/corrupted as the Laws of Athens had wished, he (like the hapless lesser sophist) would indeed have been trained to be a slave of the great beast. But somehow (through his own efforts and perhaps through divine intervention) he had educated himself (*automatos*) and so avoided that fate. What then becomes of the Laws’ conclusion that the fatherland, the *patris*, must always be revered and obeyed, and of Socrates’ claim in the *Apology* that he was duty-bound to try to improve his native polis because of the demands of *philia* and kinship?

The Socrates of the *Republic* answers at least obliquely at the end of book 9, in the course of a discussion about when it is right to take an active role in politics. The “kingly” man willingly undertakes political affairs (*fairsta . . . politika . . . prattein*) “in his own polis, but perhaps not in his *patris* except by divine providence” (592a). Glaucon grasps his meaning: by “his own polis” you refer to the polis that we established in *logoi*, since I don’t suppose it exists on earth. Socrates affirms this: the model (*paradeigma*) is laid up in heaven, and by viewing this model (Kallipolis qua Form) one may find a polis within oneself (*heauton katoikizein*). Thus—contrary to Socrates’ earlier comments about the limited value of quietism—it does not matter if the polis we described is or will come to be somewhere really, because he will attend to (*praxein*) the affairs of this interior polis alone and of no other (592a–b). With these words we may suppose that the argument of the Laws of the *Crito* for the existence of a binding contract is disproved; not only is the contract fundamentally unfair (in that it demands that substantial harms be repaid by benefits), but outside Kallipolis the philosopher’s “true polis” (the entity he must seek to improve) is his own soul, not his *patris*, and not even the souls of his fellow citizens.

Thus in the end it is only by abandoning—at least in this dialogue—the project of achieving “large-scale” justice in the polis and the “augmented capacity” that actual political activity offers to the participant, and settling for the relatively “small” and circumscribed realm of the individual human soul, that Plato manages to solve the challenge posed by Socrates’ ethical injunction to play the gadfly with the lazy horse of his fellow Athenians.¹⁴⁸ Of course, Plato

¹⁴⁸ Plato’s return to political matters in his late dialogues, including *Phaedrus*, *Statesman*, and

and other sincere Socratics would still obey the procedural laws of Athens for prudential reasons and in accordance with the general Socratic prohibition on doing harm. But neither Plato nor any other philosopher-Athenian owes anything substantial to the *politeia* of Athens, and thus is in no way duty-bound to actively seek the improvement of the polis or its residents. To the extent that the reader (ancient or modern) is dismayed by Plato's willingness to sunder philosophy from politics, private self-improvement from public responsibility for the general welfare, he or she must regret the invalidation of the *Crito* contract. With the rejection of the contract that the Socrates of the *Crito* had died to uphold, the Platonic critical project gains the capacity to change its entire nature, and some may feel that the change will be for the worse.¹⁴⁹ In light of these regrets, it is worthwhile asking whether something may be missing from the implied argument made by the Socrates of the *Republic* for tossing the contract aside.

What seems notoriously left out of the contract that the Laws of the *Crito* press upon Socrates is the benefit he had received from the freedom of the democratic polis and its unprecedented tolerance (even celebration) of diversity among its citizens.¹⁵⁰ Socrates of the *Apology* and *Crito* alludes to this only obliquely, by suggesting that he would not have much success practicing the elenchus on the relatively "well-governed" Megarians or Thebans (*Crito* 53b–c, cf. *Apol.* 37c–d). The historical Socrates had been regarded by many of his fellow citizens as a loudmouth, know-it-all, and potential troublemaker for at least twenty-five years before the trial of 399 B.C.—as Aristophanes' *Clouds* makes clear.¹⁵¹ But for at least some of that quarter-century (depending on the chronology of Chaerephon's mission to Delphi) he fulfilled his self-appointed mission by subjecting his fellows to the often-humiliating ritual of the elenchus. Thus, even if we accept that democracy does indeed manifest a hegemonic tendency, then we must also suppose that hegemony was partially counter-balanced by the democratic commitment to freedom of action, *parrhēsia*, and privacy—and above all, by the diverse (*poikilon*) nature of the democratic polis

Laws, suggests that he was never truly satisfied with the bargain—a good soul was all fine and well, but the critical grail of the just and nondemocratic polis still beckoned. Cf. 6.n.7.

¹⁴⁹ Plato's move from polis to soul seems to open the way not only for later Academic philosophy, but also for Stoicism and Epicureanism. Each of these individual-soul-centered philosophies has its attractions (see, e.g., Nussbaum, *Therapy*). But Hellenistic philosophy, freed from a debate with democracy (by historical events as well as by Plato's thinking, it is only fair to say) abandoned the search for social and political equality on the material plane. See further Schofield, *Stoic Idea of the City*; Erskine, *Hellenistic Stoa*.

¹⁵⁰ See Strauss, *City*, 130–33; Vlastos, "Political Obligation" (in *Studies in Greek Philosophy* 2.36–37); Kraut, *Socrates*, 225–28, 308–9; Reeve, *Socrates*, 100–102; Carter, *Quiet Athenian*, 183–86: "Everything we know about [Socrates] could only exist in the democracy. His restless intelligence is itself characteristic of the democracy" (186); Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy*, 100–102; Gray, "Response [to White, 'Plato's Crito']".

¹⁵¹ We must assume that Aristophanes' play, performed at the City Dionysia in 423, would not have been regarded as funny if Socrates were not already well known and an object of public curiosity and (potentially) hostile suspicion.

itself. The multifaceted and never genuinely consensual (in its strongest sense) nature of the democracy ensured that the hegemonic tendency of popular opinion remained fragmented, occasional, and historically contingent in its effects on eccentric citizens like Socrates.

Notably, the Socrates of the *Republic* places freedom and diversity at the center of his overt criticism of democracy in book 8 (555b–562a)—when describing the various corrupt regimes that are the sequential (each worse than the last) alternatives to Kallipolis. The four nonideal regimes arise naturally from the “characters” (*ēthē*) of their citizens (544d–e) and change from one to the next when *stasis* arises among the ruling class. Democracy—second in awfulness only to tyranny (568c–d, 580a–b)—arises following *stasis* within an oligarchy, and is precipitated by a violent uprising by the poor against their fat and lazy masters. Offices are then divided equally among the new rulers, mostly by lot (557a). The democratic polis is filled with freedom (*eleutheria*), free speech (*parrhēsia*), and license (*exousia*), and so each person lives privately just as he pleases (557b). Since there are all types of persons (*pantodapoi*) in democracy, it looks very pretty at first glance, just as a multicolored cloak appears prettiest. And thus the many—acting like women or children gazing at multicolored pictures (*poikila*)—judge it the fairest of regimes (557c).

This very diversity may actually make the democratic polis a suitable place in which to seek out the best *politeia*, since thanks to the extremity of license, it holds within it every sort of *politeia*. So, continues Socrates, anyone who wishes to found a polis—just as we are now doing—might well choose to go to a democracy that, being a sort of a supermarket of regimes, will allow him to pick one he likes and so to found his own (557d). But this initial optimism about the utility of democracy for the political philosopher is soon overshadowed by bitter irony: Among the advantages of a democracy, which make it “divinely sweet” for people like Socrates and his friends, is the lack of compulsion to participate in ruling even if one is competent to do so. Nor is one compelled to be ruled, nor to fight as a warrior, nor to keep the peace, nor even to obey the laws that prevent an individual from assuming office if he does not have the proper credentials (557e–558a). The irony deepens: Among its other excellences, democracy allows condemned criminals to strut about the polis like heroes. There is a complete lack of proper upbringing for its rulers combined with an eagerness to honor anyone willing to say in public that he is well disposed toward the mass of citizens (558a–c). Socrates ironically sums up democracy as a “sweet” (*hēdeia*) *politeia*, both anarchic and diverse (*poikilē*), which indiscriminately distributes a certain equality to equals and unequals alike (558c).

The “democratic man” who arises as a result of *stasis* in the soul of the oligarch is characterized by a diversity of desires and a lack of commitment to any of them; thus he lives an “isonomic life” (561e). The ultimate good that people claim to find in democracy is freedom, but this freedom breeds rampant social equality, which rapidly gets out of control and leads to what Plato (like Ps.-Xenophon) clearly regards as grotesque excess: metics become equal to

citizens, the young to the old, women to men. In the end, domestic animals, filled with the spirit of freedom and equality, become unwilling to give way to humans on the street (562b–63d). In case anyone might miss the point that the state being described is Athens, Adeimantus now chimes in: You’re relating my own dream, since that is just what happens to me when I go into the countryside (563d). Socrates reminds his fellow citizen that democracy has a deep revulsion for anything that smacks of slavery for citizens and so ends in an unwillingness to obey the laws, whether written or unwritten. Adeimantus allows that he knows that very well indeed (563d–e). So, along with diversity, freedom is most characteristic of the democratic polis.¹⁵² But in the end, this hypertrophy of freedom will lead to anarchy and to the deepest and most miserable form of slavery: the rule of the tyrant (563e–564a).

This last metamorphosis occurs when one of the *rhētores*, bored with his usual pastime of pleasing the demos by draining the wealth of the oppressed rich and accusing them in the courts of being oligarchs (and thus causing them to become oligarchs in fact), brings a legal action against an innocent man and (judicially) murders him. The unholy taste of innocent human blood turns the *rhētōr* into a monster—he begins to advocate the redistribution of property and thus is either killed or becomes a tyrant (564d–566a). Although here Socrates seems to place much of the blame for many of the symptoms of “democratic excess” (confiscations, legal accusations, judicial murder) squarely on the class of *rhētores*, he never actually calls them “rulers” (*archontes*). Rather, it is still the demos, the poor majority—although they are individually “uninvolved politically” (*apragmones*)—that is “most authoritative (*kuriōtaton*) in the democracy whenever they forgather” and makes the leader what he is (565a, c). Until a true tyrant arises, democratic leaders are produced and consumed by the excessively free, equal, and diverse culture that is inseparable from the rule of the masses.

Once again there is an unresolved conflict here between demotic ideology-as-hegemony and thus demos-as-uneducable-but-educators, and demotic freedom-as-license and thus masses-as-uneducated-but-educable. The first conception explains the Callicles phenomenon (bright young men who become democratic politicians rather than philosophers) and makes the death of Socrates into the final and inevitable act in the dramatic contest between the individual self-made philosopher and the obdurate mass of humanity whose members he futilely struggled to awaken. It also seemingly renders both quixotic and ethically unnecessary Socrates’ mission of doing good for his fellows by provoking them to become their best selves. The second conception allows Kallipolis to move beyond the realm of individual soul-improvement and holds open the hope that philosophers might actually rule—and thereby fulfill their own highest human potential and the potential of the Greek polis as a political organization. Although, in certain passages, Plato seems to advocate one position or the other, by the time we get to the end of the *Republic* (and especially if we read it

¹⁵² Cf. Dunn, “Transcultural Significance,” 105 (quoted in Introduction).

against earlier and later dialogues), it has become evident that Plato could give up neither commitment and therefore never really squared the circle.

The means Plato used in his imaginative attempt to solve his “Socrates and Athens” problem was exactly the performative, speech-act method characteristic of the democracy: vigorous, open debate conducted according to accepted protocols among persons who regarded one another as equals; followed by a resolution for action by the assembled company. It is surely not happenstance that Kallipolis, perhaps the most successful rival to pragmatic democracy in the Western tradition of political theory, arises from a discussion among three Athenian citizens in a house located in Athens’ most democratic deme, in a work written by an Athenian citizen, almost certainly while he was resident in Athens. The anarchic freedom and diversity that Plato deplored, and to which he contrasted his unitary vision of perfect consensual harmony, provided the open political environment that permitted his critical project. It also provided the political culture and a community of intellectual dissidents that provoked and informed his project.¹⁵³ If he were ever to dwell in aristocratic Kallipolis—whether it be brought about in a polis or in his own soul—Plato would have to construct his model first by acquiring the analytic tools most readily available in the chaotic supermarket of democratic Athens, and then by sharpening those tools through engagement in an ongoing debate with the democratic *politeia* and its critics.

¹⁵³ My view here is related to, but ultimately diverges from, that of, e.g., Euben, Saxonhouse, and Monoson (above, 4.n.9), who see Plato’s Socrates as embracing and even celebrating the diverse and open speech typical of Athens. This threatens to assimilate Socrates too closely to our own modern and liberal ideals. Reading Plato seems to me more worthwhile if we allow his Socrates to remain genuinely and sharply critical of ideals we most cherish. Cf. Villa, *Arendt*, xi: “Unlike some recent commentators, I have not attempted to ‘rethink’ Arendt in order to make her more available to our current political movements. All too often such ‘appropriative’ readings have wound up either domesticating her thought or rejecting its central thematic concerns.”

Eloquence, Leadership, Memory: Isocrates *Antidosis* and *Areopagiticus*

IN TURNING FROM Plato to his fellow citizen and close contemporary Isocrates (436–338 B.C.), we move generically from metaphysical dialogue to epideictic rhetoric. Intellectually we turn from the ambitions of an “epic theory” that attempts to remake the world, to a more quotidian criticism that hopes (or claims to hope) for limited amelioration within an existing political system regarded as revisable and worth revising. Isocrates was, according to his own self-description, deprived by his lack of nerve and weak voice of the chance to become a genuine *rhētōr* (5.81, 12.10); instead of addressing the Athenian demos, Isocrates taught rhetoric at his Athenian school to leisure-class students (cf. 15.304) drawn from around the Greek world. He published a number of orations (most of them evidently meant to be read aloud in private settings) as demonstrations (*epideixeis*) of his eloquence. Several of Isocrates’ orations, distinctive in that they mimic symbouleutic or (in the case of the *Antidosis*) dicanic oratory, are overtly critical of the Athenian political status quo. Indeed, they are at times sharply critical, but the ideas they express may not initially strike the modern reader as particularly original when compared to the satiric barbs launched at the democracy by Aristophanes, much less when placed alongside the profound critical analyses of democratic politics offered by Thucydides or Plato.¹

A. A RHETORICIAN AMONG THE CRITICS

Isocrates’ speeches seem, at first glance, to take us back to the environment inhabited by Ps.-Xenophon and his ilk, a world of disgruntled aristocrats (Athe-

¹ Text and translation of both orations considered here: G. Mathieu (Budé, 1942), G. Norlin (Loeb, 1929). There has been much debate over whether Isocrates was a serious political thinker (as I suppose) or a mere rhetorician who wrote only to attract students. For the former view: Adams, “Recent Views”; de Romilly, “Eunoia”; Mathieu *Idées*; Bringmann, *Studien*, esp. 83–95; Markle, “Support of Athenian Intellectuals”; Wallace *Areopagos*, 158–73. Baynes, “Isocrates,” points out the difficulty of separating political from rhetorical goals in writing, but goes too far in portraying Isocrates as a sophist. The argument of Harding (“Purpose” and “Laughing”) to the effect that Isocrates had no political intentions and wrote merely to display his verbal facility is based on an impoverished understanding of political discourse. On the coherence and unity of Isocrates’ oeuvre as *politikos logos*: Too, *Rhetoric of Identity*, 10–112. Isocrates’ school and methods of teaching: Jebb, *Attic Orators*, 2: 8–13; Jaeger, *Paideia*, 3: 46–70; Johnson, “Isocrates’ Method”; de Romilly, *Problèmes*, 184–85; Too, *Rhetoric of Identity*, 151–232. Like *Areopagiticus*, Isocrates’ orations *On the Peace*, *Plataicus*, and *Panathenaicus* are pseudo-symbouleutic and critical of Athenian policy.

nian and non-Athenian) who find democracy distasteful in various ways. Such men spend considerable time in voicing their dissatisfaction to one another, and yet they are unwilling or unable to do much of anything about it. Isocrates evokes this milieu in the introduction to his *Areopagiticus*:

We sit around in the shops (*ergastēria*) denouncing (*katēgoroumen*) the current state of affairs and claiming that we have never been worse governed under a democracy (*en dēmokratiai kakion epoliteuthēmen*), yet according to our actions (*pragmata*) and the sentiments (*dianoiai*) that we hold in regard to it [the current *politeia*], we cherish it (*agapōmen*) more than that regime which was handed down to us by our ancestors. (7.15)

In this passage Isocrates points to a constant level of dissatisfaction, but carefully limits its scope: “We have never been worse governed *under a democracy*”; by implication there were worse nondemocratic governments within living memory. Like Plato of the *Seventh Letter*, Isocrates implies that the current regime, however problematic, is preferable to the oligarchic interludes of the late fifth century. Yet, unlike Plato, Isocrates did not abandon hope for democratic amelioration; the question, Isocrates suggests, is how to improve *dēmokratia*, not how to replace it with *oligarchia*. When compared with Plato’s political philosophy, Isocrates’ critical discourse in the two speeches considered here appears limited in its ambitions and conventional in its recommendations. It is sprinkled with topoi familiar from Ps.-Xenophon and from Plato’s caricature of democracy in *Republic* book 8, occasionally enlivened by what sound very much like echoes from other Platonic orations and from Thucydidean critical history.² It is, we may suppose, a reasonable approximation of what had become, by the mid-fourth century, a canonical and perhaps rather desultory list of complaints; just the sort of buzzing by fat, lazy, stingless flies that one might actually expect to hear on an ordinary afternoon in an Athenian shop favored by the leisure class.³

Yet if the content of his political criticism lacks originality, Isocrates nonetheless claims to be (and may indeed be) more than just an epitomizer of other men’s ideas or a spokesman for the discontents of his class. He supposes that his highly developed skill at rhetoric, a facility at manipulating words that was both innate and refined by education and practice, could transform the droning murmur of the *ergastēria* into a program of action.⁴ If Ps.-Xenophon’s argu-

² The debate between Isocrates and Plato (explicit only at Plato *Phdr.* 278e–279e) is explored in detail by Eucken, *Isokrates*, esp. 270–83. See also Ford, “Price of Art”; Nightingale, *Genres*, 13–59. Isocrates’ debt to Thucydides: Luschnat, “Thukydides,” cols. 1276–80; de Romilly *Thucydides*, 359–62.

³ An analogy is the verbose, ineffective cicadalike murmuring of the Trojan Elders in the Teichoskopia scene of *Iliad* 3.150–55, with the insightful analysis of Mackie, *Talking Trojan*, 38–39. Theophrastus’ “Oligarchic Man” (*Char.* 26) caricatures the type; see below, 7.B.

⁴ Innate ability, formal training, and practical knowledge in Isocrates’ pedagogy: 13.14–18 (*Against the Sophists*); 15.194, with Too, *Rhetoric of Identity*, 185. Whether Isocrates actually did influence men of affairs to undertake particular policies is another question; see, for example, Laistner, “Influence of Isocrates.”

ment, drawn from similar sources, ended in *aporia*, perhaps this failure was rhetorical, attributable to the author's clumsiness as a wordsmith. Isocrates was as careful a craftsman of elegant *logoi* as Athens ever produced. If skill at manipulating language could be sufficient to the task of focusing the background noise of aristocratic complaints into a clear argument against popular rule, then Isocrates was surely the right man for the job. The question is, of course, whether skillfully crafted speeches that assume the generic form of publicly performed addresses, yet are directed toward private reading audiences, can in fact be adequate to the critical project of exposing and proposing solutions to substantive problems within a system that is overtly based on genuinely public, performative speech.

Both because of and despite his apparent conventionality, Isocrates' oeuvre is important for the student of Athenian critical thought. His speeches are contextually significant because they offer insight into the intellectual culture that formed the background and provided the original audience for the monumental and startlingly original projects of Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle. Moreover, Isocrates' epideictic orations demonstrate that some of the big ideas best articulated by Plato and Thucydides not only were drawn from, but eventually were reintegrated (often in modified forms) into a broader critical-intellectual culture. But Isocrates is also interesting in his own right in that he, more explicitly than any previous Athenian political writer, portrays himself as existing within and contending with a matrix of critical voices. Whereas Thucydides and Plato leave their readers fairly subtle traces of their own competitive struggles for primacy within the critical community, Isocrates is up front about the game and willingly displays his dueling scars. He portrays himself as a critical commentator who concerns himself with democracy. But he also claims to be a prominent rhetorician and a famously wealthy Athenian citizen—the object addressed by a variety of elite and demotic critics. While affecting shock and indignation at attacks upon himself, upon his profession, and upon his polis, Isocrates clearly takes pride in adopting the role of master competitor in a perpetual contest in which he is surrounded by opponents. The heroic, even martial image he invokes has Athenian political antecedents stretching back to the early sixth century. Solon is one of Isocrates' political icons (see below, 5.A.3); though Isocrates does not indulge in direct intertextual reference to the poet-lawgiver's metaphors (wolf beset by dogs, boundary post separating two hostile armies), it seems likely that he had Solon (among other culture heroes) in mind when he constructed his verbal self-portrait of a hero who takes up his post "in the midst of the jousting ground."⁵

It is in his finely honed orations that Isocrates depicts the attacks of his

⁵ For the Solonian metaphors, see Loraux, "Solon au milieu de la lice." Of course, the general image goes back at least to the Iliadic warrior (e.g., Patroclus in *Iliad* book 16) surrounded by enemies on all sides. In addition to the ironic reference in Plato *Phaedrus* (above, 5.n.2), Isocrates was attacked explicitly in Speusippus' *Letter to Philip*, by implication in Plato *Euthydemus* 305b–c, and by ironic citation of *Antidosis* in Aristotle *EN* 1181a12–19. On Isocrates and his rivals, see, further, Mathieu, *Isocrate: Discours*, 89–101. Isocrates' readers: Usener, *Isokrates*.

opponents. It is his masterful deployment of the *technē* of rhetoric that he will claim allows him to answer the opposing critical voices and thereby to resolve the substantive issues that they raise. Isocrates' *logoi*—embodying his *paideia*, which is also his *philosophia*—join their author at the center of the fray. They are the putative subject of the several disputes, and they are (he claims) the means by which all quandaries can be resolved in favor of his rhetorical art. Through the same epideictic speeches in which he proves himself to be the master of *logoi*, Isocrates invites his listeners/readers to embark upon his educational curriculum (*paideia*). That curriculum presents a way of life and a mode of comprehension and expression (a *philosophia*, cf. 15.50) that will allow students to deal with the cacophony of critical speech. They will learn to counter and refute that which is slanderous or deleterious, embrace that which is meritorious, and avoid extremism of all sorts. Moreover, Isocrates' *philosophia* holds out the promise of a political program (*politeia*) that will fulfill the needs and guarantee the just deserts of all decent persons, in the polis of Athens and in the broader realm of Hellas.⁶

Among the elite critics with whom Isocrates contended, Plato and the Academy hold pride of place. By the early decades of the century, Platonic dialectic already threatened to monopolize the term *philosophia*, reserving what had become (in educated elite circles, anyway) a strongly marked and prized word for an intellectual undertaking that had no sympathy for the sort of rhetorical education and *technē* championed by Isocrates. Whether or not Isocrates had actually been a student of Gorgias, Plato's *Gorgias* (and the later *Phaedrus*, among other dialogues) made it eminently clear that in the view of his school, neither practitioners nor teachers of rhetoric could ever be regarded as philosophers. Indeed, for the Academy, rhetoric was a branch of sophism and as such was inevitably foreign to philosophy proper.⁷ Moreover, the *Republic* had developed the metaphysical justification for an epistemology that rendered rhetoric irrelevant to the central problem of connecting ideas with words, objects, and actions. In the course of sorting out problems of ethics, ontology, and epistemology, Plato had developed an ethico-political program that threatened to displace as potential leaders the sorts of student Isocrates hoped to produce. Finally, Plato had argued in the *Republic* for a new form of moral and political education that would, if accepted as paradigmatic (in form and ambition, if not in practical detail) by Greek elites, invalidate and obviate the rhetorical *paideia* Isocrates offered his own students.

⁶ What Isocrates means by *paideia* and *philosophia* are elaborated in his early didactic essay, *Against the Sophists*, cited in *Areopagiticus* (15.195) in support of the claim that he used identical *logoi* to his students and the jurors. See further Eucken, *Isokrates*, 5–35; Too, *Rhetoric of Identity*, 151–99.

⁷ Isocrates' speeches show that *philosophia* had become a key term in intellectual circles by the early to mid-fourth century; the title *philosophos* was a valued prize well worth contending for; see Nightingale, *Genres*, 10–11, 26–29; Wardy, *Birth of Rhetoric*, 94–96. The tradition that Isocrates had been a student of Gorgias (as well as of Teisias and Theramenes) became very important in later attempts to write a sequential history of Greek rhetoric: e.g., Ps.-Plutarch *The Ten Attic Orators* 836f–37a, with Kennedy, *Art of Persuasion*, 174–85; Too, *Rhetoric of Identity*, 235–39.

This threatened monopoly might in itself have been enough of a challenge to provoke a response from Isocrates, but there was more. The content of several of Isocrates' speeches makes it quite clear that by the mid-fourth century (if not before), if one claimed to be an intellectual—a practitioner of *philosophia*—one must also be a critic of the rule of the people. Plato and his associates tried to claim as their own not only the terminology of *philosophia*, but the project of criticizing democracy from an intellectual perspective. Plato's "epic" foundationalist project provided the Academy with a distinctive and seemingly secure ground from which to challenge the hegemony, indeed the legitimacy and very reality, of democratic knowledge. Moreover, the trial and execution of Socrates had gained for the Academy a genuine and widely (especially but not uniquely within the elite community) acknowledged martyr. Socrates, of course, had not regarded himself as the founder of a philosophical school, nor was the Socratic heritage a unique possession of the Academy.⁸ But Socrates had died at the hands of the democratic state of Athens for the sake of philosophy qua dialectical/elenctic inquiry. Those, like Isocrates, who espoused the cause of philosophy qua rhetorical *epideixis* had no comparable figure to counterpoise. The democracy certainly had punished (sometimes with death) any number of public orators, but it could not be said that any of them had suffered or died for the cause of philosophical rhetoric per se.⁹ If Isocrates hoped to provide his *technē* with resources to stand up to the Platonic challenge, he would have to find a way to refute the claims of Platonic dialectic and education to a general superiority on the basis of their better apprehension of the relationship between ideas, experience, and the world. And he would have to establish for himself a place in the critical spectrum worthy of his own self-image and capable of standing up to (or better, displacing) Socrates, the martyr-hero who was so central to Platonic ethics and political thought.

Finding and securing that place was no simple undertaking. In the *Antidosis*, Isocrates asserted his superiority to his philosophical rivals on the grounds that, whereas they sought to attract a few students, he focused on policies that were good for "the entire polis" (15.84–85). Yet, while Plato and his dialectical approach to problems of knowledge and power threatened to crowd out all competitors from the realm of totalizing, "external" political criticism, the real-world, incremental-change, "internal critic" end of the spectrum was being occupied by the practicing rhetors. Public speakers like Demosthenes and Aeschines stood up before their fellow citizens in Assembly and in the people's court and freely railed against their fellow Athenians' failures to live up to the high political ideals and elevated standards of international conduct putatively established by their ancestors. Modern Athenians, according to the rhetors, were getting soft. They cared too much for the pleasures of the moment; they

⁸ For the Cynic and Stoic alternatives, see John Moles, in Rowe and Schofield, *Cambridge History*; Long, "Socratic Tradition."

⁹ Athenian rhetors punished by the demos: Cloché, "Hommes politiques"; Hansen, *Eisangelia*; Roberts, *Accountability*; Knox, "So Mischievous." Cf. Nightingale, *Genres*, 5, noting that Plato typically attacks genres or individuals as synecdoche for genres.

were too willing to listen to those (other) public speakers who recommended policies that were sweet and easy, rather than difficult, austere, and worthy of the polis' traditions.¹⁰ Not only did the rhetors criticize the contemporary tendency to slackness in their publicly delivered speeches, some of them (notably Andocides and especially Demosthenes) published (or at least allowed to be circulated) certain of their major dicanic and symbouleutic speeches; the existing corpus of speeches suggests a surge in publication by working rhetors in the period around 355–343 B.C. By mid-century if not before, Isocrates' *epideixeis* thus had to compete not only with the showpiece orations of his fellow rhetoricians and with Platonic dialogues, but also with the polished, written versions of actual speeches delivered in major addresses before the Athenian Assembly and in famous public trials.¹¹ Isocrates refers directly to the challenge of the practitioners of symbouleutic oratory when he asserts that certain people claim that “those speeches are much better and more profitable which denounce (*epiplētontas*) our current errors than those which praise (*epainountas*) our former accomplishments, and those which advise us in regard to what we ought to do (*dei prattein symbouleuontas*) than those which dredge up ancient deeds (*erga*)” (15.62). What was the teacher and practitioner of epideictic oratory to say in response?

Isocrates' relationship to the working rhetors was complex: they might be his competitors for students and prestige within the elite community, yet on the other hand, they might actually be his students (directly or indirectly), and they were the practitioners (however imperfect) of what he regarded and taught as the master *technē*. Isocrates could hardly take refuge in Platonic scorn for all forms of overtly rhetorical speech as a corrupt manifestation of a degenerate democratic political culture. Instead, if Isocrates were to find a secure and prominent niche for himself in the intellectual/critical community, he was constrained to distinguish between the speech of the public orators and his own rhetoric. That distinction could be established in large part on the basis of form and style. But in light of the challenges offered by both the Academy's claim to ontological rigor and the working rhetors' claim to practicality and seriousness, the content of Isocrates' *epideixeis* must be capable of convincing sophisticated consumers of critical discourse that Isocrates really had something to say, that he was more than a mere juggler of words. Hypersophisticated disquisitions on traditional sophistic topics (e.g., the *Defense of Helen*, a topic addressed by both Gorgias and Isocrates) alone simply would not cut it in the competitive

¹⁰ Ober, *Mass*, 318–24. The orators' criticisms of contemporary mores was one of the primary exhibits in the (now-debunked) notion that the fourth century was an era of decline and decadence; see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 29–31.

¹¹ On the history of circulation of symbouleutic speeches, Yunis (*Taming*, 242–43) may place too much emphasis on Demosthenes' originality given the existence of Lysias 34 and Andocides 2 and 3 but is certainly right to point out that there is a sudden floruit of publication of symbouleutic speeches in the mid-fourth century. Trevett (“Aristotle's Knowledge”) argues that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* never cites written versions of symbouleutic or dicanic speeches, but he gathers considerable evidence for Aristotle's knowledge of them. For the chronological seriation of surviving orations, see Ober, *Mass*, 349: table 1.

intellectual environment of mid-fourth-century Athens: if he wanted to be a player (as he certainly did) in the major leagues of Athenian intellectual life, Isocrates had to enter the critical fray and demonstrate that his *paideia* offered a distinctive and effective means for focusing and expressing the now-canonical list of elite concerns about Athenian democracy.

Dialogues emanating from the Academy and the published orations of working rhetors hardly exhaust the list of critical voices to which Isocrates felt himself called upon to respond. Panhellenism (or at least a highly developed sensitivity to a cosmopolitan Greek-speaking community that was at once much broader and much more exclusive than the citizenship of his native polis) is a hallmark of Isocrates' literary oeuvre. In numerous speeches (notably *Panegyricus*, and *Panathenaicus*), Isocrates portrays himself at once as a loyal Athenian citizen and champion of Athens' reputation, and as a cosmopolitan inhabitant of a wider Hellenic society. In *Antidosis* he claims that his oft-proclaimed policies would be to the advantage of both Athens and Hellas (15.79). "Intelligent persons (*tous noun echontas*) should concern themselves for both [polis and Hellas], but among these, they ought to give preference to the greater and worthier cause" (15.80). Thus, loyal Athenian Isocrates ultimately preferred to work for the greater good of a society that transcended polis affiliations, and he sought to incorporate upper-class Greek-speakers into an overarching order that was both very old (harking back to Homeric and archaic antecedents) and a "postmodern" product of the new post-Peloponnesian War international situation.¹² Isocrates' Hellas was simultaneously culturally expansive and socially delimited. It simply had no place for the ill-educated lower classes; Isocrates hoped that at least some of the worst of these might be removed from Hellas altogether through colonial ventures.¹³ Yet the polyphonous complexity of aristocratic society, which embraced both elite Greeks from a variety of old poleis (with their strong commitment to the ideal of "similarity" among aristocrats)¹⁴ and the autocratic kings of Macedon and Cyprus (among others), required spe-

¹² This elitist cosmopolitan tendency had a long ancestry. For the celebration of an ideal of aristocratic culture that emphasized extra-polis connections between elites at the expense of polis solidarity in archaic Lyric poetry, see Kurke, "Politics of ἀποσύνῃ"; Morris, "Strong Principle." In postwar literature, much of Xenophon's oeuvre (especially the *Cyropaedia*) shares Isocrates' vision of a Greek cultural ideal that would include those not normally regarded as "truly" Greek, including some hellenized Asians; cf. Dillery, *Xenophon*, 54. Walzer (*Company of Critics*, 126) generalizes the point: "Old and established elites, aristocracies especially, are always more cosmopolitan than the men and women they rule." Panhellenism in Isocrates: Mathieu, *Idées*, 41–50; Bringmann, *Studien*, 19–27; Buchner, *Panegyrikos*. Wardy (*Birth of Rhetoric*, 87–88) notes in particular Isocrates' use of the reality of growing Macedonian power to reorient rhetoric and its task, from the democratic *ochlos* to the great individual; compare below, 6.E.4.

¹³ The desire to rid Hellas of disruptive lower classes drives Isocrates' schemes (esp. in *Philip*) for invasion and colonization of western Asia: in his view, disruptive Greek social elements could simply be resettled eastward; see Fuks, "Isokrates"; Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 15–16. Colonization also figured in the critical political thought of Isocrates' younger contemporary, Aristotle, although Aristotle envisioned a more distinguished class of colonists; see below, 6.E.1.

¹⁴ Distinction between "similarity" (*homoiotēs*) and equality (*isotēs*) and the two kinds of equality: Cartledge, "Comparatively Equal."

cial talents of those who would claim to speak for it. Few men were worthy to do so; those (like Isocrates) capable of rising to the occasion should, he claimed, be regarded as superior to the run-of-the-mill lawgivers who concerned themselves merely with the parochial affairs of a single polis (15.80–81).

His cosmopolitan viewpoint was a vital component of Isocrates' critical perspective and central to his attempt to elevate his own rhetoric above the public orations delivered and published by the Athenian rhetors. As a self-styled spokesman for Hellas, Isocrates was well aware that aristocratic Hellenic society found much to complain about in Athens' foreign policy, past and present, and he was sympathetic to many of their concerns. Much of his own critical voice, which emphasizes the close links between Athenian domestic politics and errors in foreign policy, is borrowed from these "Hellenic" concerns. The admixture of an extra-Attic perspective, which focused on foreign relations, to the traditional concern with *dēmokratia* per se helped Isocrates to distinguish himself from other Athenian writers of rhetorical *logoi*, while simultaneously linking him to the Thucydidean and Xenophontic critical tradition that viewed Athens within a wider Greek context. Isocrates asserts the superiority of orators who focus on Hellenic issues to the writers of (polis) *nomoi*, on the grounds that because laws are old and numerous, collecting them is simple, whereas oratorical originality is difficult (15.81–83). He castigates his fellow citizens in the *Antidosis* for their failure to accord appropriate praise and honors to the champions of the Hellenic cause (15.301–2). Indeed, "you" (Athenians) are so mistaken about what is really to your advantage that "you are more pleased with those [orators] who cause you to be reviled [by the Hellenes] than with those who cause you to be praised, and you think that those who have made many [Hellenes] hate the polis are more loyal friends of the demos (*dēmotikōteroi*) than those who have inspired goodwill toward the polis among all they encounter" (303). Isocrates' implication, that the Athenian citizen masses regarded proponents of Athenocentric policies as inherently more democratic than advocates of policies that took into account the broader Hellenic frame, underlines his establishment of a critically useful antithesis between a cosmopolitan aristocratic/panhellenic perspective and a parochial demotic/polis-oriented habit of thought.

Isocrates utilized his expansive Hellenic perspective and his expert knowledge of his own polis' standing in the view of elite sectors of Hellenic society to challenge popular beliefs about what sorts of policy were genuinely democratic, as well as to elevate the stature of his own critical voice above that of the working rhetors with their more circumscribed perspective. And yet, as an Athenian rhetorician, Isocrates felt constrained to defend and to eulogize his native polis by deflecting excessive or misdirected external criticisms and by reminding the Greeks of the excellent and selfless services that Athens had performed for Hellas in generations past. In this enterprise, he had recourse to the Athenian tradition of the Funeral Oration, which provided a stock of eulogistic *topoi* that the master orator wove ad lib into speeches of quite a different

sort.¹⁵ Thus it was by establishing a Hellenic context for his rhetoric that Isocrates was able to answer his “practical” critics: his speeches could claim to accomplish the best ends (for his polis and Hellas) both by proposing that which “ought to be done” in the present *and* by praising the great past deeds of the Athenian ancestors.

B. ISOCRATES’ VERBAL MONUMENT TO HIMSELF: *ANTIDOSIS*

The critics who confronted Isocrates were not limited to his fellow aristocrats. Isocrates may have lived his intellectual life in the Hellenic society of like-minded educated elites, but he lived his material life in and as a native-born citizen of Athens. As a prominent member of the Athenian elites of wealth and education, Isocrates could expect to encounter among his fellow citizens demotic voices willing and able to challenge his lifestyle on the grounds that it did not conform to egalitarian democratic norms. As he explains in the *Antidosis* (written in 354/3, when he was eighty-two years old), Isocrates became acutely aware of the potential seriousness of falling afoul of the Athenian demos when he was formally challenged to a property exchange by a fellow rich man who felt that Isocrates’ estate was more capable of bearing the burden of a trierarchy than was his own.¹⁶ Isocrates was willing neither to exchange properties nor to accept the liturgy voluntarily; his recalcitrance led to a trial. The venerable teacher of oratory clearly expected that his rhetorical expertise would enable him to win the suit easily—after all, it was his boast that those who had mastered the intricacies of epideictic would find it very easy to deploy dicanic rhetoric to good effect (15.49). And so it came as a considerable shock to Isocrates when he lost the suit and was forced to take on the trierarchy himself. The outcome of the trial—at which his opponent painted a portrait of the rhetorician as hugely wealthy, the teacher of numerous students, and a diabolically clever speaker—convinced Isocrates that the Athenian demos had over the years formed a very inaccurate opinion of him (15.4–6). By the time of the trial, this opinion had become so deeply ingrained that the jury was actually willing to accept his opponent’s slanders at face value and was unwilling to listen sympathetically to his own more “objective” account of the facts of the matter. Isocrates concluded from this experience that the Athenian lower classes (*hoi polloi*, *to plēthos*: both terms are used frequently and interchangeably in the speech) were driven to decide against him by the jealousy they felt for himself and his type. That jealousy was, he now realized, both fanned and exploited by the low-rent courtroom orators, the sycophants who pandered to and willfully misled the Athenian people by attacking innocent victims in the people’s courts.

¹⁵ Isocrates’ reworking of traditional themes from the *epitaphios*: Buchner, *Panegyrikos*, 7; Loraux, *Invention*, 86–97.

¹⁶ *Antidosis* procedure: Christ, “Liturgy Avoidance”; Gabrielsen, *Financing*, 91–95.

B.I. A Novel Oration and Its Imagined Audience

No doubt the humiliating defeat in the *antidosis* trial and the subsequent financial loss entailed in assuming the liturgy were painful for Isocrates. But the incident was also providential in that it provided the stimulus and background for the production of a unique oration. Isocrates' *Antidosis* features a self-consciously innovative structure (15.1) that allows the rhetorician the opportunity to identify and answer a wide range of accusers. Better yet, it allowed Isocrates to present himself in the role of (potential) martyr for the cause of philosophical rhetoric.

The *antidosis* trial itself was an inadequate platform for Isocrates' monumental *apologia*: The actual trial had ended in rhetorical defeat and only property, not life, was at stake. Isocrates therefore took the bold step of composing a new sort of speech, one that began by proclaiming its own uniqueness: This speech would be neither actual dicanic (*pros tous agonas*) nor properly epideictic (*prostatas epideixeis*). Because of its novelty and distinctiveness it might even appear bizarre (*atopos*) if Isocrates did not explain what he was up to (15.1). He then proceeds to do so, describing the "actual" historical events associated with his trial and the liturgy, and admitting what a rude awakening the entire experience had been for him:¹⁷ whereas he had always known that "certain of the sophists" (i.e., other Athenian rhetoricians and Plato's sort of philosopher) were wont to slander his profession (*diatribē*) by claiming it was nothing more than writing speeches for other litigants in the courts, he had supposed that their blatherings were without influence or effect (*dunamis*, 2–3). He had imagined that, given his choice of grand topics for his earlier orations and the overall quietude (*apragmosunē*) of his life, he was regarded as a decent fellow by all private citizens (*idiōtai* [i.e., non-*rhētores*], 3–4). After the trial, though, he realized that it was not only his fellow intellectuals, but many ordinary citizens who held him in deep and undue suspicion (4–6). He thus felt the need to vindicate himself in the present circumstances and for posterity with a lasting and worthy verbal monument to himself: "A *logos* . . . my own memorial (*mnēmeion mou*) . . . much fairer than any bronze statuary." This verbal monument would accurately characterize his life and thought and thereby refute the misapprehensions and slanderous insinuations that he now knew to be swirling about him on all sides (7).¹⁸

¹⁷ There is no way to prove that the *antidosis* trial really took place, but it seems too elaborate to regard it merely as a conceit (and an unflattering one at that) to launch a greater conceit. I tend to think that the events really did happen and were quite well known—after all, a trial featuring a rhetorician of Isocrates' stature was likely to make a mark in a city that loved a hot trial. For "onlookers" in Athenian trials, see Lanni, "Spectator Sport."

¹⁸ Isocrates here alludes to the long tradition of competition between verbal and representational art for the memorialization of persons and events; cf. Thucydides' reworking of this topos, above, 2.C.3. On the complex tradition of the poem or speech as a memorial, well known from archaic poetry, and the related tradition of the inscribed grave monument that "speaks" (usually in verse) to the passerby, urging him/her to pause to consider the life of the deceased, see Svenbro, *Phrasikleia*,

But what sort of *logos* should it be? The problem, as Isocrates perceived it, was jealousy (*phthonos*)—jealousy of Isocrates himself on the part of other intellectuals and jealousy of his class, the educated and rich, on the part of the demos. In an atmosphere of jealousy, self-eulogy was likely to be counter-productive; it would add fuel to the flames (8). Isocrates was quite happy to have his intellectual rivals consumed by envy of his skills, and indeed, he intended that this oration should exacerbate their pain. But he did not want to inflame bad feelings among the many, feelings that were in any case based on ignorance of the “real” Isocrates (13). Eventually the happy solution presented itself: Isocrates would explain himself and his profession in a defense speech offered in a fictional (*hupotheimēn*) trial brought by a notional sycophant named Lysimachus who employed calumnies similar to those brought out by his real opponent in the actual *antidosis* trial (8). But this fictional trial would be much grander than any mere squabble over property.¹⁹ The charge brought by “Lysimachus” was that Isocrates corrupted the youth by teaching them to devise specious arguments capable of overthrowing the cause of justice (30). The penalty Isocrates faced if Lysimachus were to defeat him was death (75).

It is, perhaps, not surprising that Isocrates chose to write a fictional speech of self-defense on potentially capital charges. The pseudo-dicanic oration, written as if for, but never delivered in, the Athenian people’s courts, was a familiar genre within the critical community by the mid-fourth century.²⁰ Isocrates’ oration was, however, a hybrid rather than simple pseudo-dicanic. Smoothly merging dicanic and epideictic is no easy task, as Isocrates underlines (10: “neither easy nor simple”; 11: “no small *ergon*”), and it arguably leads to some clumsiness of exposition. Isocrates does not overestimate the difficulty, novelty, and distinctiveness of his undertaking: the *Antidosis* is indeed unique in explicitly and repeatedly calling attention to its own hybrid and fictitious character.²¹

Why take such care to signpost as imaginary, to the point of irritating redundancy, a speech that is intended to be the lasting monument to a life and a career in rhetoric? A variety of explanations may be offered, but among the payoffs of Isocrates’ meta-rhetorical explanatory proem is the establishment of the double (mass and elite) audience to which the speech purports to be directed. Even a slow-witted reader learns that this oration would directly confront (and refute) Isocrates’ demotic critics by speaking of his merits with over-

13–52; Hedrick, “Thucydides”; Steiner *Tyrant’s Writ*, 139–42. Misch, “Isokrates Autobiographie,” discusses Isocrates’ self-description in this speech, with special reference to Plato’s *Seventh Letter* and the tradition of the encomium.

¹⁹ Nightingale (*Genres*, 26–40) offers an insightful reading of the speech, focusing on Isocrates’ validation of his insider status and his claims to *charis* on the strength of his generosity with *intellectual* (as opposed to material) property. Cf. Too, *Rhetoric of Identity*, 109–11.

²⁰ The “Apology of Socrates” seems to have become a subgenre of its own: Lesky *History*, 499. Other evidence for the genre of pseudo-dicanic depends on how many speeches in the oratorical corpus one supposes were actually written not for real trials, but rather as examples written by logographers seeking new clients. Dover, *Lysias*, remains seminal, although I believe he overstates the case.

²¹ E.g., 8, 10, and esp. 13: *tēn apologian tēn prospoioumenēn men peri kriseōs . . . boulomenēn de peri emou*.

whelming persuasive force to an audience addressed as *andres Athēnaioi* and *dikastai*—the traditional terms used by litigants when addressing Athenian juries. Unlike the Socrates of the *Apology*, the Isocrates of the *Antidosis* radiates confidence in his ability to change the minds of his jurors (28, 169–70)—even when making the standard claim to be unfamiliar with courtroom tactics (27, cf. 36–38) and despite having handicapped himself in this contest by his determination to speak only the truth (43–44). His presumptive victory in the mock trial will vindicate him and his profession before the Athenian demos. And yet, because the speech was a self-proclaimed fiction, Isocrates could freely engage in digressions and asides overtly aimed at confronting and confounding his elite, intellectual critics. In the proem, Isocrates announces his intention to include not only things that might be said in a courtroom but also material inappropriate to a dicanic oration, “frank discussions about *philosophia* and expositions of its effective power” (*dunamis*, 10). And, as promised, at a number of points in the oration, Isocrates turns from the demotic jury to address an elite audience of cognoscenti (e.g., 55–56). That elite audience can variously encompass both his jealous rivals and his sympathetic supporters.²²

Given Isocrates’ goal of constructing, in a single speech, a lasting monument to his life and career, one that would be capable of speaking with equal eloquence to both his fellow citizens and his Hellenic peers, his overt fiction was an elegant solution: True dicanic rhetoric (or even seamless dicanic fiction) offered limited opportunities for engaging in extended “high culture” polemics, whereas ordinary epideictic necessarily ignored the demotic audience. It was only by inventing a new, hybrid genre that Isocrates could depict himself as a brave, beleaguered citizen of both Athens and Hellas, the hero-martyr who stood in the metaphorical middle of the battle and at the syntactic center of the antithesis—dealing out telling blows to the ignorant jealousies of *hoi polloi* on the one hand, while dispatching his pettifogging fellow intellectuals on the other.²³

Isocrates’ generically novel oration allowed him to distinguish between mass and elite: he apologizes to those who are intimately familiar with his earlier masterpieces (students and admirers) for citing long sections of them, pleading the extremity of his danger (55–56).²⁴ But it also served to merge the two audiences: mass and elite are imagined as serving together on the jury that would judge the political worth of Isocrates’ *logoi* by deciding whether or not they harmed the polis and corrupted the youth. The imaginary context is in turn provided by the real and ordinary practices of the democracy: it was a real trial

²² Double audience: 55–56, 154, 170, 195. The double audience is not as bizarre as it might appear, given that major political trials attracted considerable audiences in addition to jurors; above, 5.n.17.

²³ See esp. 13: Isocrates will exact just revenge (*dikēn labein*) upon his rivals by causing them to be consumed by the disease (*nosos*) of jealousy (*phthonos*). On the intertwined relationship between justice, disease, revenge, and punishment in Athenian thought, see Allen, “Situation of Punishment.”

²⁴ Isocrates asks the clerk of the court to read the extended passages, pleading his own advanced age (15.59). By analogy with a real Athenian trial, this would have the effect of stopping the water clock and introducing the passages as documentary “witnesses.”

that stimulated the monument-speech. It is the danger presented by the demos' distrust to Isocrates qua philosopher that is the justification for a key aspect of its monumentality: the presentation of long passages from the rhetorician's finest *logoi* to an audience that includes not only his fellow citizens, but also his students and his critics. The requirement to defend himself presented the ideal "mixed" forum for a demonstration of Isocrates' true excellence as displayed in his *epideixeis*, present and past, and of his special worth as Athenian and Hellenic. And thus it is the democracy's "bad" attitudes and practices (especially its suspicion of the excellent man who stands out from the crowd) that provide the opportunity and occasion for Isocrates' grand monument of self-justification. The self-proclaimed excellent man requires this sort of exposure (at least in its fictive version) in order to advertise his own worth beyond the claustrophobic private circle of his (albeit numerous, 41, 86–88) students and admirers.²⁵ This need for (pseudo-) public vindication before a double audience, and the role played by the democracy in providing the opportunity for such vindication, remind us, however, of a central question: By placing himself in the middle of the fray, even in this metaphorical sense, does Isocrates show himself capable of standing out as an original and independent critical voice? Or (as Plato would have it of all public orators) does he reveal himself as helplessly entangled in the web of democratic knowledge and practice?

B.2. *Isocrates' Mimesis of Socrates*

Among the best-known and most immediately obvious aspects of Isocrates' *Antidosis* is its close relationship to Plato's *Apology of Socrates*. The charges Isocrates pretends to face are very similar to (although lacking the religious dimension of) those actually faced by Socrates, and the potential penalty is the same. Moreover, Isocrates makes numerous allusions that inevitably recall Plato's dialogue: He draws a distinction between his old accusers and the current indictment (32: *Apol.* 18a–b). As proof that he did not corrupt anyone, he notes that no one now comes forward claiming to have been corrupted by him (33–35, cf. 86–88: *Apol.* 33d). If, as his opponent claims, he actually did teach his students anything, their subsequent excellence suggests that Isocrates deserves greater gratitude than those feasted in the Prytaneion (95: *Apol.* 36d–e). He requests that jurors restrain themselves from indulging in uproar (*thorubos*, 20, 272: *Apol.* 21a, 27b, 30c). His peroration centers on a principled refusal to parade friends and family before the jury in a bid for sympathy (321: *Apol.* 34c–d). Examples could be multiplied, but the basic fact of the direct intertex-

²⁵ Cf. above, 1.n.62, on the aristocratic symposium as an alternative polis. Isocrates' construction of a fictive audience that includes ordinary as well as elite citizens suggests the limits of such simulacra for self-presentation, given the enduring strength of cultural norms that allowed, even expected, a notable man to counterbalance moderation and "quietism" with an overt display of excellence in the public spaces of city. Relevant Athenian examples include Thucydides' Pericles and Demosthenes' self-portrait at 18.169–79. The depiction of Arendt (*Human Condition*) of the polis as a human environment uniquely suited to the public "appearance" and memorialization of great deeds by individuals, even if overstated, is relevant here.

tual relationship is not in doubt.²⁶ Nor, in a speech that sets itself the task of explaining how rhetoric is *philosophia*, is there any doubt about whether Isocrates intended his audience to recognize the echoes. The question is not whether but why Isocrates chose to foreground Plato's *Apology of Socrates* as the model (in terms of form if not of prose style or primary content) for what he claims will be his own verbal monument to himself. After all, Plato was one of Isocrates' primary intellectual rivals. If the hierarchy of mimesis implies a subsidiary role for the imitation and the superiority of the original, then Isocrates seems to have put himself in a dubious position indeed.²⁷ What benefits did he perceive that might have outweighed the potential subordination of his own *apologia* to the Platonic model?

If we imagine Isocrates working within the "company of Athenian critics," at least part of the explanation for Isocrates' decision to mimic Plato's *Apology of Socrates* must lie in Socrates' distinctive status within a rapidly crystallizing critical tradition. By the mid-fourth century, Socrates was the one clear example of an intellectual martyr to popular rule.²⁸ His uniqueness is indirectly confirmed by Aeschines' (1.173) comment of 346/5 to an Athenian jury: If you let "Demosthenes the sophist" free now, your action would imply that your conviction of "Socrates the sophist" a half-century previously had been unjust. In addressing the demotic jury, Aeschines uses the conviction of Socrates as a convenient example of a problematic decision that might be proved unjust in retrospect: "you" jurors (he pointedly uses the second-person plural) will be guilty of having wrongly condemned Socrates if you allow Demosthenes to get away with worse crimes. Aeschines' comment suggests that democrats and critics of democracy were united in their acknowledgment that Socrates' case was memorable and special. Thus, for Isocrates, determined to address both democratic mass and critical elite audiences, eager to equate his own rhetorical *philosophia* with Plato's dialectical *philosophia*, and concerned to claim his rightful place in the critical community, there was little choice. Once he had determined that a hybrid oration that would merge dicanic and epideictic rhetoric was his best vehicle, the trial of Socrates inevitably became his model, and Plato's version of it was the outstanding literary version.²⁹

²⁶ Echoes of Plato's *Apology*: Too, *Rhetoric of Identity*, 192–93; Nightingale, *Genres*, 28–29 (with literature cited), arguing that the imitation is "part of Isocrates' attack on Plato's portrayal" of Socrates (28).

²⁷ Inferiority of the copy: e.g., Plato *Rep.* 602b, *Statesman* 297c. Too (*Rhetoric of Identity*, 184–94) discusses *mimēsis* in Isocratean pedagogy with special reference to the imitation of Socrates in the *Antidosis*.

²⁸ Wallace ("Private Lives") demonstrates that most other alleged persecutions of intellectuals by the Athenian democracy are literary fictions. He argues that the one exception, and so the only other possible candidate for an intellectual martyr, is the Athenian citizen and musical theorist Damon, who was ostracized in 440s, apparently because the Athenians sincerely believed that his musical experiments had potentially serious political ramifications. Damon is mentioned in the *Antidosis* (235) as an excellent teacher of sophism and (along with Anaxagoras) a teacher of Pericles.

²⁹ Whether Isocrates' choice of Plato's *Apology* tells us anything about the authenticity of Plato's account, per Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 7–9, is another question. Isocrates chose

In his introductory comments, Isocrates lets his audience know that the actual impetus for his speech was the “unfair” treatment he suffered in being assigned a trierarchic liturgy. Whining about how the greedy demos forced rich men to pay more than their fair share of liturgies was a constant refrain in the cacophonous symphony of quotidian elite complaints about popular rule. By transforming the subject of his trial from *antidosis* to “the corruption of the youth,” by ensuring that his day in court would recall the trial of Socrates, Isocrates thereby transubstantiates shopworn elite grumbles about democratic practice into a principled inquiry into the premises of the people’s rule. By the magic of skillful and imaginative rhetoric, the standard and selfish squabble over liturgies familiar to every upper-class Athenian was elevated to the level of the martyrdom of Platonic philosophy’s hero. By slipping into the role of Plato’s Socrates, Isocrates transformed himself from just another rich man forced to do his financial duty to the democratic state into a hero who bravely and defiantly proclaims his unwavering intention to adhere to a stern code of critical ethics. Isocrates thus laid his claim to a leading position within the critical community. Isocrates, like Socrates, presented himself as a persecuted intellectual, ill understood by his fellow citizens, who failed to grasp the great good that he in fact accomplished for the polis. By assimilating himself to the model of Socrates, Isocrates situated himself at the cutting edge of the critical enterprise: the point at which the individual citizen pushed the prototypical Athenian political virtue of frank speech (*parrhēsia*, 10, 43–44, 179) to, and potentially beyond, the limit. Which meant that he knowingly chose to risk death at the hands of the people rather than accept their authority to suppress his critical voice.

Isocrates’ assumption of the Socratic martyr’s mantle had other benefits. Perhaps most obviously, the man who faced capital punishment, and thus the possibility that his defense speech would be among his last words, might grant himself permission to speak in a manner that would appear overboastful and distastefully self-congratulatory in other contexts.³⁰ Plato’s Socrates looked upon the (real) trial as an opportunity to attempt provocative improvement of his fellow citizens, but his arrogant pride in his high principles and in his bravery under fire is clearly in evidence in Plato’s *Apology*.³¹ Isocrates, like Socrates, claims that his speech has an important pedagogical purpose: demonstrating to the public the content and worth of Isocratean *paideia/philosophia*. But, given that he had been charged “in regard to his *logoi*,” the means of Isocrates’ demonstration would justly be his *logoi* themselves, that is, a recapitulation of lengthy passages from fine speeches he had written long before (52–54). These citations will allow the jurors to judge “not on appearances but from

Plato’s account because he needed to confront both Socrates (qua martyr) and Plato (qua intellectual rival). I doubt that it much mattered to him whether the account was “authentic”; the point is that it was (in the view of his key intellectual rivals) authoritative.

³⁰ Above, 4.B.1. Athenian litigants did sometimes boast in their speeches, but they were usually careful to hedge their boasting by displays of demotic conformity: Ober, *Mass*, esp. 304–9.

³¹ Socrates’ pride and arrogance in the *Apology* has been the cause of some discomfort among modern scholars; see, for example, Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 210–34.

accurate knowledge” (*ou doxasantes alla saphōs eidotes*: 54, with echoes of both Thucydides and Plato), but they are obviously not meant as merely educational. They are collectively an *epideixis* of the speaker’s persuasive power (*dunamis*, a key term in this oration, as it had been for Thucydides): the audience will appreciate, by hearing the extracts, Isocrates’ *ēthos* and the *dunamis* of his *logoi* (54). Isocrates arrogantly claims that he will gladly pay the greatest penalty if the jury should find his *logoi* other than “incomparable” (75, cf. 80, 86–88, 144). Such an overt display of masterful power would normally be unsuitable—especially when one’s opponents claimed that excessive persuasiveness in speech (the *dunamis* of his *logoi*, 5) constituted a threat to the public weal. But the man who faced the greatest of dangers, and who felt himself to be superior to other men and believed that they could benefit by a clearer apprehension of his unique qualities, might reasonably choose to use the short time remaining to him in advertising his superiority in terms that were rather less guarded than the Athenian norm: “If I were to repeat my orations merely to make an *epideixis*, I would reasonably be liable to this sort of complaint, but now that I am on trial and I am in great jeopardy (*kinduneuōn*), I am forced to use my speeches in this fashion” (55). At the beginning of the *Antidosis*, Isocrates expressed his unwillingness to eulogize himself in any sort of traditional way for fear of stimulating greater jealousy among his fellow citizens. But since he could soon be facing the hemlock, he might be allowed license to explain why it was that he held himself and his profession in such a high regard (178–79). And thus, the setting in a capital trial allowed Isocrates to play the part of the central character in his own drama and to make a demonstration of his own considerable powers as a rhetorician.

Isocrates, of course, only confronted death in the carefully transparent fiction of his speech. The very overtness of the fiction allowed him to ignore the restrictions imposed by the water clock and to write a super-*Apology*, several times the length of Plato’s dialogue. The great size, as well as the highly polished style, of Isocrates’ monument to himself compensated for any self-subordination that the mimesis might have entailed. With enough words, well enough arranged, Isocrates was confident that he could show himself and his *logos* to be more than worthy of his models: the man Socrates and the text of Plato’s *Apology*.³² The structure of the *Antidosis* allows Isocrates to have his cake and eat it, too: he not only addresses a double audience, he equates himself with Socrates as a martyr to popular rule and claims the risk-taker’s special privilege of *parrhēsia* regarding his own self-worth. And he does all of this without incurring any actual danger and without the need to impose any restriction on the length or content of his oration. That oration ranges over many topics that are not directly relevant to the subject of this book, but criticism of democracy is among its central themes.

³² *Antidosis* runs to seventy-seven pages in the Teubner editio minor without the extracts from other speeches; Plato’s *Apology* is thirty-three pages. Misch (“Isokrates Autobiographie,” 202) and Too (*Rhetoric of Identity*, 48) comment on the speech’s prolixity. On monumentality as a desired attribute in earlier Greek literary culture: Martin, *Language of Heroes*, 222–31, 238.

B.3. Great Men in the Democratic Polis

Like his predecessors in the critical enterprise, the Isocrates of the *Antidosis* regards the relationship between public speakers and mass audiences to be a particularly problematic feature of Athens' *dēmokratia*. He organizes his critique of the speaker/audience relationship around the concepts of *therapeia* (positively: nurture or medical treatment; negatively: menial service, attending upon, paying court to) and *phthonos* (jealousy, envy of another's goods and fortune).³³ The evil sycophants—who supposedly thrived uniquely in the democratic environment of Athens (39) and of whom the fictional Lysimachus is the exemplar—pay court to the demos by public flattery and gain their own private advantage by dragging prominent and wealthy citizens into the courts on trumped-up, slanderous charges that “you” (fictive jurors) are all too ready to accept (24–26, cf. 164). The reason for the popular willingness to accept outrageous misstatements about good and moderate citizens is a widespread *phthonos* directed at those who are wealthier than most or in other ways superior (31).

An unnamed colleague of Isocrates had warned him about this problem: “Some people have been so brutalized by *phthonos* and poverty (*aporia*) that they make war, not on wrongdoing but on prosperity, and they hate not only the most respectable people (*hoi epieikestatoi*), but the finest pursuits” (142). These people (i.e., *hoi polloi*) are oversympathetic to malefactors and do their best to destroy those whom they envy by misuse of democratic institutions. Worse yet, they do this in full knowledge of the deleterious effects of their votes; they intend to do injury to good people and believe that by preserving those low-class types (politicians) who are similar to themselves, they are providing for their own safety (143). This is a hostile redescription (and, notably, an anonymous one—voiced by Isocrates' associate, not the orator in his own voice) of the democratic norm of employing collective voting to safeguard the dignity of the ordinary citizen against the unrestrained power of the wealthy elite.³⁴ It claims that those jurors who vote against rich men do so not out of a concern for the collective good, but out of envy and malice. This unjust practice in turn supposedly leads the rich to hide their wealth from the prying eyes of the demos, and so the vicious circle continues. But, we soon learn from Isocrates (now once again speaking in his own person), this sorry state of affairs has not always pertained. In Isocrates' youth, private wealth was completely secure, and each citizen affected to own more than he did because he enjoyed the social standing (*doxa*) that wealth brought. By contrast, “now it is necessary to keep

³³ On *therapeia* and its various verbal forms, see esp. the splendidly illogical 15.70: Isocrates does not *therapeuein* the Cypriot king Nicocles' wealth or his *dunamis*, but urged the monarch to be merciful in his treatment of his subjects. Therefore, since in speaking to a king, Isocrates spoke “on behalf of the [Cypriot] demos,” so surely he would urge those living under a democracy to *therapeuein* the *plēthos*. *Therapeia* was, of course, a key Platonic concept, especially in the *Gorgias*: above, 4.C.4.

³⁴ See above, 4.n.48.

watch and to prepare a defense against being rich as if it were the gravest of crimes" (159–60). Modern Athens takes positive pleasure in repressing and humiliating honest citizens (*hoi epieikeis*) and in granting license to malefactors (164).

The modern decline had, in Isocrates' view, been the result of the rise of miserable sycophants to positions of influence. Their rise was itself a by-product of the excessive self-assurance of the previous (fifth-century, imperial) generation of Athenians, who came to prefer inferior men (*ponēroi*) to the *kaloi k'agathoi* who had made Athens great, thinking that it was likely that persons of lowly social origins would restrain their ambitions and unlikely that they would be eager to install a nondemocratic *politeia* (316–17). The speeches and policies of these new, manifestly inferior leaders led to disaster: they accused "the men of highest repute (*endoxotatoi*) among the citizens and those most capable of doing the polis some good of harboring oligarchic sympathies and of being Spartan sympathizers." Worse yet, through their reiterated calumnies, the sycophants succeeded in making these worthies into just what they were accused of being (i.e., oligarchic laconophiles). And this devolutionary trend (corrupted demos chooses low-class leaders who transform once-loyal elites into oligarchic traitors) subsequently led to all of the catastrophes of the later stages of the Peloponnesian War and its aftermath (318–19).

The passages considered so far fail to rise much above the aristocratic complaints familiar from Ps.-Xenophon. They suggest that quotidian elite complaints about democracy remained pretty consistent over three-quarters of a century. But they do not seem to add much to the "critical project" that is either new or intellectually exciting. Isocrates' criticism becomes more interesting, however, when he attempts to vindicate the reputation of certain Athenian leaders of the past (contra Plato), and to link their excellence with their mastery of rhetorical *paideia*. Isocrates' focus on great men and their mastery of speech in turn brings the leaders of bygone generations into a more complex relationship with the democracy, since it was democracy that provided the distinctive environment (mass decision-making audiences) in which their worthy speeches were delivered. It all becomes even more interesting and complex when Isocrates confronts the issue of why it was that none of his own students had been able to live up to the standards of the great men of Athens' past. Why could his students not manage to halt, and indeed reverse, the modern decline, given their access to and mastery of the tools of persuasion: the peerless rhetorical instruction Isocrates claims to have provided?

It is in the course of defending his profession of instructing students in rhetoric against the charge that it produced mere busybodies (*polupragmones*) and sycophants that Isocrates first launches his eulogy of the great leaders of Athens' past: If it is the case that among the present and recently deceased politicians (*politeuomenoi*), it is those who paid most attention to the study of rhetoric who were and are the best of those who approach the bema, so, too, "among the ancients, it was the best *rhētores*" who enjoyed the finest reputations and who brought the greatest benefits to the polis (231). The first of these

heroic figures of Athens' past was Solon, who, when he was established as "leader of the people" (*prostatēs tou dē mou*), made laws, arranged affairs, and provided for the polis in such a fine way that even now the form of government (*dioikēsis*) that he put into place is beloved (*agapasthai*, 232). After him came Cleisthenes, whose eloquence enabled him to persuade the Amphictyons to lend him the god's money. With this resource, he "brought back (*katēgage*) the demos, expelled (*exebale*) the tyrants, and established (*katestēse*) the democracy itself, a source of great blessings for the Hellenes" (232). Then Themistocles, leader (*hēgemōn*) during the Persian Wars, was so eloquent that he successfully advised your Athenian ancestors to abandon the polis, and thereby he elevated (*proēgagen*) them to the position of masters of Hellas (233). Finally Pericles, being both a good demagogue and an excellent *rhētōr*, beautified (*ekosmēse*) the city with superb buildings and stored up (*anēnenke*) a vast surplus of wealth on the acropolis (234).

It is important to Isocrates' critical argument that each of these leaders was no mere mouthpiece of the demos, but a genuine and independent agent of change—the important verbs in the passage are all active and in the third-person singular. A bit later he reiterates that it was through "the practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) of one man" that Athens became the greatest and most prosperous of Greek poleis (250).³⁵ And yet it is equally important to Isocrates to show that the instrument of historical agency was in each case a careful attention to the art of eloquence (*logoi*); indeed, "so much more did they apply themselves to this [eloquence] than to other matters, that Solon was named as one of the Seven Sophists (*sophistai*)," and thus he was given "the very title [*sophistēs*] that is now dishonored and being tried by you." Pericles, according to Isocrates, later studied with two sophists, Anaxagoras and Damon, the latter reputed in his time to be the wisest (*phronimōtatos*) of the citizens of Athens (235).³⁶

These conjoined arguments (leaders are active agents of change, the instrument of their agency is rhetoric) are reiterated, elaborated, and strengthened near the end of the speech. Isocrates calls upon his audience to remind themselves "of the beauty and the magnitude of the *erga* that were accomplished by the polis and by the ancestors," to think that over and to consider

what sort of man, and what sort of education and birth he enjoyed, who expelled the tyrants, brought back the demos, and established the democracy. What sort was he who defeated the barbarians at Marathon and so was the source of the fine reputation that came to the polis as a result of the battle? What sort was he who, after him, freed the Hellenes, led our ancestors to the hegemony and the empire that they held, and seeing the natural advantages of Piraeus, encircled the city with walls in spite of the Spartans? And what sort was he who, after him, filled the acropolis with silver and gold and filled private homes with vast prosperity and wealth? (306–7)

³⁵ The Greek text is difficult here, but cf. 7.11, which supports the reading offered.

³⁶ Cf. 15.1313: The Athenian ancestors respected *sophistai*, despised sycophants. Here Isocrates deliberately challenges the ordinary contrast good *philosophoi*/bad *sophistai* that he had advocated in his earlier essay *Against the Sophists*; compare Plato (above, 4.D.4); Xenophon *Cyn.* 13.9.

If Isocrates' listeners will review each career for themselves, they will, he assures them, find that it was not persons who lived sycophantic or careless existences who accomplished these things (*tauta diapepragmenous*), but rather it was those men who were "distinctive and superior, not only in terms of their good birth and their reputation, but in wisdom and in eloquence (*tōi phronein kai legein*), who have been the authors (*aitioi*) of all of our blessings" (308). The moral of the story, which the audience was to take to heart, is that although the *plēthos* should retain the privilege of public trial in the case of personal disputes and a share in the other commonalities (*koina*),

you ought, however, to cherish (*agapan*) and honor (*timan*) and court the favor of (*therapeuein*) those who are superior by nature and by training and those who aspire to achieve such superiority, since you know that leadership in fine and great undertakings, and the power to keep poleis safe from dangers and to preserve the *dēmokratia*, rests innately with (*enestin*) these men, and not with the sycophants. (309)

Isocrates' first point in these two important and closely related passages (231–35, 306–9) is that since the worthy leaders of the past studied rhetoric, and could even (in the case of Solon) be called sophists (reiterated at 313), "sophism" —in its traditional rather than its pejorated modern (i.e., demotic and Platonic) sense—was not a bad thing at all, and training in the art of rhetoric does not, ipso facto, make men bad. His second point is that men who were naturally excellent and who learned the arts of rhetoric were the engine of Athens' historical rise to a position of dominance in the Greek world. Moreover, it was these great orators who had created the democracy and who were capable of preserving the polis and safeguarding its democratic *politeia* from the manifold dangers facing it. By the end of §309, the contrast is to the doing nothing sycophants, but at the beginning of the section it is made clear that another important contrast is between the mass of citizens (*to plēthos*), who are to retain certain legal privileges and a formal "share" in the polity, and the superior few, who should be "cherished, honored, courted," and allowed free rein to produce the goods that they alone are capable of producing: greatness, prosperity, and security.

In Isocrates' capsule history of democratic Athens, the demos was passive during the progressive period of expansion and improvement, which lasted from Solon through Pericles. It is, we are to suppose, only later, when the people became more arrogant than was good for them, that they began to prefer sycophants to the excellent leaders of the past, and this was the cause of the polis' catastrophes (316–17, see above). If they take this lesson to heart as they should, the members of the demotic segment of Isocrates' double audience will abandon their current bad habits of being jealous of the elite and preferring sycophants to aristocrats as leaders. The members of the elite segment of the audience (at least those who have received the benefit of an Isocratean education) will be free of the effects of demotic jealousy and so ready and able to take their rightful places as the agents of renewed progress.

As it was for the ancestral heroes whose exploits were recapitulated in the oration, the instrument of the new leaders' imagined accomplishments would be

persuasive eloquence. Isocrates here seems to be challenging Plato by reiterating a Thucydidean tradition that honored the accomplishments of certain democratic politicians (especially Themistocles and Pericles). Isocrates goes beyond Thucydides by establishing a political genealogy of Athenian “true sophists” that stretches back to Solon and forward to the ideal future anticipated in the *Areopagiticus*. And yet, as Plato had pointed out in the *Gorgias* and *Republic*, there is a problem involved in attributing complete agency to individuals, when the instrument of their great deeds is persuasive speech delivered to democratic decision-making bodies. When Miltiades urged the Athenians to face the barbarians at Marathon, or when Themistocles called upon them to abandon Attica, were the ensuing successes properly attributed to the speaker, or to the mass of citizens who gathered in Assembly, who listened to a variety of policy options, who voted for the one that seemed best to them, and who subsequently carried out the various actions necessary to implement the policy? Is successful public persuasion evidence for the speaker’s originality, or of his ability to repackage notions that may already be current among the many in the most pleasant and palatable form? Is the successful speaker who faces a noisy mass audience of willful decision-makers really in control of his audience, or, as Plato emphatically asserted, does the audience control the speaker?

Twentieth-century readers, trained in the language of representative democracy, may find it quite easy to suppose that leaders are firmly in control and that the masses are ordinarily quiescent recipients of decisions made on high by more or less well-qualified experts.³⁷ Elite political agency was, however, much less obvious to fourth-century Athenian readers. Plato (among other critics of democracy), the Athenian *rhētores*, and the Athenian demos agreed on at least one thing: in democratic Athens, the demos was authoritative, and this meant that leaders were disposable advisors, not masters or rulers or even decision-makers in their own right. Isocrates, while declining to face the mass audience in his own person, hoped to show that the demotic control typical of the current regime had not always pertained, nor need it be the politics of the future. But in order to make his case, he had to demonstrate that the existing constitution could be significantly ameliorated—and without resort to the sort of totalizing “epic theory” advocated by his rival in the Academy. As we have seen, Isocrates was quite unwilling publicly to embrace *oligarchia*; if he were to suggest meliorative revisions in the constitution, he felt the need to do so under the rubric of *dēmokratia*.

B.4. *Timotheus and the Impossible Priority of praxis*

The problem of the relationship of the leader, and especially the leader trained in Isocratean rhetoric, to the fourth-century democracy and the Athenian demos comes to a head in Isocrates’ long digression on the career of Timotheus, son of Conon (101–9). Timotheus was Isocrates’ student and, for some years, a suc-

³⁷ See, for example, Kallet-Marx, “Institutions, Ideology.”

successful Athenian general. His career had ended when he was tried by the people's court on charges of treason (*prodosia*, 129), convicted, and slapped with a huge fine. Unable to pay the fine and so suffering formal *atimia* (partial disenfranchisement), Timotheus had gone into exile to the island of Chios, where he had recently died. His trial had taken place in 356 B.C., only a few years before the *Antidosis* was written.

Isocrates claims that his fictional opponent Lysimachus had slandered Timotheus and had used Isocrates' pedagogic relationship with the disgraced general against him. Responding to this calumny presents the opportunity for Isocrates to restore the good reputation of Timotheus and to explain the relationship between Timotheus' education and his career. It is for Isocrates a particularly uncomfortable fact that his prize student (like the real Isocrates in the actual *antidosis* trial) had failed to prevail in the people's court, where his presumably finely honed rhetorical skills might have been expected to have saved him. It had been important for Plato to demonstrate (in the *Gorgias*: see above, 4.C.4) the incapacity of Socratic rhetoric to effect changes in the polis-as-it-is by contrasting Socrates' moral but unpersuasive speech with the immoral but persuasive rhetoric taught by Gorgias. Yet for Isocrates, a teacher of rhetoric in the Gorgianic tradition, there is no apparent payoff in demonstrating that his own public speech or that of his students cannot achieve material effects in the real city.

Isocrates clearly intends Timotheus to be compared to the great leaders of Athenian history (who are discussed later in the oration): like them, he is called the author (*aitios*) of many blessings for the polis (101, 135). Timotheus, Isocrates tells us, was not only a superb general (a primary burden of the digression), but a "good citizen" (*politēs agathos*, 106), who "engaged in politics along with you" (*ho meth' humōn politeuomenos*, 115).³⁸ Yet as a leader, he did not pander to the Athenians, but contradicted their set opinions on matters of foreign policy, and he forced the Athenians to pay proper attention to relevant objects. He not only accomplished great results for Athens, but he did so while paying careful attention to Hellenic concerns, and so he improved Athens' reputation abroad. Most remarkably, he accomplished his marvelous effects as a general without any help from the polis.³⁹ So far, Timotheus qua exemplum of the well-trained student of Isocratean *paideia* seems to fit Isocrates' prescription

³⁸ Here, Timotheus is implicitly contrasted with Socrates' "students" Alcibiades and Critias, who could hardly be regarded as good citizens by any Athenian standard. The careers of these two men were obvious sore points for Socratics: Xenophon (*Mem.* 1.2.39, 47) claims that they were ill-suited from the beginning to follow Socrates, and thus Socrates was not responsible for the injuries they did to Athens. Plato (*Grg.* 456d–57c) gives to Gorgias an elaborate argument as to why teachers should not be blamed for their students' misbehavior. Isocrates himself resorts to the "blame students, not teachers" topos at 15.251–2, in what Wardy *Birth of Rhetoric*, 170 n. 20) suggests may be "an unacknowledged debt to the *Gorgias*."

³⁹ Did not pander: 116 (*ou tēn autēn humin gnōmēn eichen*), 121 (*ouk epēkolouthēse tais humeterais gnōmais*). Attention to right objects: 112 (*prosechein humas autēi ton noun epoiēse*). Hellenic concerns: 118, 121–27. Without help from polis: 118 (*aneu tēs poleōs anelomenos*), 120 (*to mēden para tēs poleōs lambanein*).

extremely well: As a good citizen he is shown to be no friend of oligarchy. But he demonstrates his genuine leadership and independence from the demos by openly contradicting demotic prejudices and by forcing the demos to pay attention to what it ought to be undertaking, rather than to whatever it pleased. He has learned (presumably from his teacher) the need to pay attention to both Athenian and, especially, Hellenic concerns. And the issue of agency is resolved in a tidy fashion: since Timotheus succeeded as a general in the absence of any material help from the polis, no one can say that he is not, in his own person, the author of the goods he secured for the polis.

Yet the question remains: If Timotheus personified the Isocratean ideal of the loyal citizen with an independent public voice and a Hellenic orientation who accomplished great deeds on his own, then why was he convicted in the people's court and punished with a fine so huge that it ended his public career? Isocrates devotes several paragraphs (129–39) to answering this question. He introduces this section of his oration by noting that “*hoi polloi* among you” must be astonished at Isocrates’ unstinting praise for a man convicted of treason, since to praise Timotheus might be regarded as a condemnation of Athens (129). But in fact, Isocrates claims that he intended to speak on behalf of the polis (*boulomai gar kai ton huper tēs poleōs logon eipein*) as well as on Timotheus’ behalf. Thus he will attempt to clear the polis of the charge of having secured an unjust conviction while simultaneously (if posthumously) acquitting the convicted man of the charge on which he was convicted. He inaugurates this seemingly daunting task by immediately dispensing with the issue of “justice itself” (*auto to dikaion*), since by that austere standard (with strongly Platonic connotations for any reader of the *Republic*), Athens’ treatment of Timotheus must indeed be regarded as “harsh and vicious.” But if one makes allowances for the ignorance (*agnoia*) that possessed all humankind, for the jealousies (*phthonoi*) that beset us, and for the turmoil and confusion in which we pass our lives, it becomes evident that nothing that happened to Timotheus was without reason (*alogōs*), nor did the decision lie “outside the bounds of human nature” (*exo tēs anthrōpinēs phuseōs*). Indeed, Timotheus himself was in some degree responsible for the erroneous judgment passed in his case (130). This entire passage is redolent with verbal echoes of both Plato (justice itself) and Thucydides (human nature). Whether Isocrates is actually citing his literary predecessors directly, or merely recalling language that had become standard within the critical community, it is clear that he plans to answer both demotic critics who questioned the propriety of his relationship with Timotheus and elite critics who looked askance upon the *paideia* his unfortunate student had received in Isocrates’ school.

According to Isocrates, Timotheus must share the blame for his fate, not because he was a democracy-hater (*misodēmos*), or arrogant (*huperēphanos*), or a misanthrope, but because of his *megalophrosunē*. Like some other key terms used by Isocrates, *megalophrosunē* could have very different connotations depending on the context, ranging in this case from the very positive “greatness of

spirit” to the negative “haughtiness.”⁴⁰ Isocrates obviously intends the audience to keep both the positive and the negative aspects of the word in mind. While *megalophrosunē* was a virtue in a general, it was, Isocrates admits, out of place in the quotidian environment of the polis, and it led Timotheus to be regarded as an arrogant, misanthropic democracy-hater. The problem, as Isocrates saw it, was one of public relations: Timotheus proved as inept at the *therapeia* of men as he was skilled at the handling of affairs (131). Isocrates had warned him of the problem, urging the general that public men must “consider well how to appear gracious (*epicharītōs*) and sympathetic in all that they say and do” lest they appear to their fellow citizens to be disagreeable and offensive (132). The underlying problem was, once again, the nature (*phusis*) of *hoi polloi* and their susceptibility to flattery: they prefer (*philousi*) those who focus on gaining *charis* rather than accomplishing anything good (133). If Timotheus would only seek the goodwill (*eunoia*) of the people, he could expect glowing public praise for his successes and pardon for any errors he might commit; since he did not, he was regarded as worse than the do-nothing politicians and generals who were his inferior contemporaries (134–35).⁴¹

This was, however, only to be expected, “for such men [the do-nothings] court (*therapeuouσι*) the rhetors and those who are effective *logos*-makers in private gatherings (*tous en tois idiois sullogois logopoiein dunamenous*) and who pretend to know everything while you [Timotheus] not only neglect, but go to war with, those who are generally the most influential of them” (136). In Isocrates’ account, Timotheus errs gravely in doing this: many before him had come to grief or had become *atimoi* (dishonored or disenfranchised) because of the lies (*pseudologiai*) of these men.⁴² For proof of this contention, one need only look to past generations: it was those public men who found for themselves poets and historians (*logopoioi*) who were subsequently remembered; better men who failed to attract eulogistic biographers necessarily fell into obscurity. And thus Timotheus should not despise those to whom the *plēthos* tended to listen, not only when it came to their fellow citizens, but on the subject of public affairs generally. If Timotheus, for his part, listens to Isocrates, “you [Timotheus] will undertake some degree of care and *therapeia* in respect to them [the tastemakers] so that you may in turn enjoy a fine reputation on both sides, both because of your accomplishments (*praxeis*) and because of their *logoi*” (136 –37³).

⁴⁰ *Megalophrosunē* (and cognates) as a positive attribute (greatness of mind): Hdt. 7.136; Isoc. 2.25, 9.27, 12.60, 12.242; Plato *Symp.* 194b. In a negative sense (arrogance): Antiph. 4.3.2; Plato *Euthydemus* 293a; Xen. *Hell.* 4.5.6.

⁴¹ *Eunoia* is a central issue in the speech: see esp. 279–80 on its *dunamis*. In Isocrates’ thought: de Romilly, “Eunoia.”

⁴² Cf. 18–19: Isocrates castigates the great evils done by public calumny (*diabolē*), a comment with strong overtones of Thucydides’ Diodotus.

⁴³ Here Isocrates seem clearly to be situating himself within the doubled tradition of “masters of prose” and “masters of song,” delineated by Nagy *Pindar’s Homer*. See above, 2.n.7.

When Isocrates gave Timotheus this sort of advice, he tells his audience, the latter admitted that his teacher was right, but he could not change his nature (*phusis*), which meant that he could not “bring himself to the level (*summetros*) of those people who were intolerant of their natural superiors.” And so it came about that the *rhētores* took on the task (*ergon*) of making up numerous false allegations about him, and the *plēthos* accepted as valid the things they said about him (138). Isocrates concludes his digression on the career of Timotheus by claiming that if the occasion permitted, he could effectively refute those slanderous allegations, and that when his audience heard his refutation, they would come to hate the men who had induced the polis to be angry at Timotheus as well as those who continue to speak ill of him (139). But time does not permit, and Isocrates turns back to his *apologia* of himself.

Isocrates’ explanation for why Timotheus was convicted and fined is complex, and its complexity is in part the result of his ambivalence regarding the role of rhetoric in the democratic polis. That ambivalence may be attributed, at least in large part, to his intense awareness of the dubious status of rhetoric within the critical community. Isocrates’ account of his conversation with Timotheus—with its focus on *therapeia*, *charis*, and the likelihood that an upright man would be unjustly convicted in the people’s courts—has obvious affinities to Socrates’ dialogue with Callicles. The allusion to the role of poets and *logopoiōi* in the preservation of the memory of human accomplishments recalls Thucydides’ methodological introduction. Yet Isocrates’ own self-situation within the set of critical debates inverts the experienced critical reader’s expectations: Isocrates depicts himself as urging the stubbornly righteous Timotheus to compromise with the tastes of the demos or suffer dire consequences (thus taking Callicles’ role rather than Socrates’). He then urges Timotheus to ensure his fame by courting the very set of writers Thucydides had despised as preferring acclaim to accuracy. Rather than speaking as a rejectionist critic, exterior to the democratic polis community, who seeks to demonstrate why democracy is a hopeless enterprise, Isocrates takes for himself the role of a concerned member of both the democratic and the critical communities, who seeks an appropriate means to reintegrate the interests of the upright individual and his polis.

In Isocrates’ view, the fault for Timotheus’ fall lies with three parties: the Athenian *plēthos*, the speakers (public and private), and the general himself. The *plēthos* is guilty of preferring sweet-talking flatterers to brusque men of action, but this failing is innate; it is the *phusis* of *hoi polloi*. Timotheus, too, is the victim of his inability to change his *phusis*: being the sort of man he was, he simply could not bring himself to make the sorts of compromise (i.e., engage in *charis*-seeking and the *therapeia* of influence-peddlers and demos) necessary to secure his position in the polis. Which leaves Isocrates with the speakers. Given that the *phuseis* of the democratic majority and the ideal leader for the democracy were fixed and antagonistic, it presumably should have been the job of the masters of *logoi*, the only truly free agents in the equation, to reconcile the two other parties, and thereby to produce the best outcome for leader, citizens, and

polis. But in fact they did just the opposite, by slandering and thereby destroying the effective leader. According to Isocrates' logic, their motive was, on the one hand, a desire to feed the demos the sort of rhetoric it desired, and on the other hand, their irritation at Timotheus' failure to engage in the sort of fawning courtship they had become used to. And so, turning their powerful verbal weapons against the worthy general, the speakers both destroyed his career and (Isocrates implies) still threaten to inflict a permanent *damnatio memoriae* upon him: despite Timotheus' excellence, he may not be remembered because he failed to court those in whose power it lay to memorialize the names of men.

B.5. *The Corruption of Language*

Where does Isocrates the expert rhetorician (along with his *paideia* and *philosophia*) fit into this picture? He appears as a character in his own "Timotheus logos," only to engage in a notably unsuccessful attempt at persuading the general to defy his nature by courting those *logos*-makers who established people's reputations in public speeches and in private gatherings. Now, this advice might be taken as ironic, but the heart of Isocrates' *paideia* was teaching people how to present themselves and events in ways that would catch the attention and win the favor of their listeners. When Isocrates' student was an Athenian man of affairs, this meant teaching him how to present himself to the Athenian demos and to those persons to whom the demos listened most avidly. Moreover, Isocrates tells Timotheus that he must court the orators—both public rhetors and those who are influential in private gatherings—in order that he may enjoy eternal fame. Isocrates himself, while not a rhetor, obviously regards himself as among those who are most influential at elite private gatherings. Thus when he tells Timotheus that he must pay court to such people, he is not only explaining the sordid compromises that were necessary these days because of the corrupt workings of the modern democracy. He is also explaining his own position in the system of creating lasting fame, and thus he assimilates himself and his profession to the great poets (epic, epinician, and tragic) of the past and to the historians. Notably, the private tastemakers are described as *hoi logopoiein dunamenoi* (those capable of making *logoi*) and the counterparts of the poets are called *logopoioi* (makers of *logoi*). The reader now realizes that despite his position as an "internal critic," Isocrates, like Thucydides, is engaged in a contest with his literary predecessors. Private rhetoric, in Isocrates' scheme (like critical history in Thucydides'), will replace poetry and (Herodotean) history as the vehicle of eternal renown. Indeed, the present oration is overtly meant as a memorial, an artifact (*mnēmeion*; comparable to Thucydides' history as a "possession [*ktēma*] for all time," 1.22.4) that will preserve the reputation both of its author and, we now realize, of his most illustrious (if, by nature, most bull-headed) pupil.

To recapitulate: Isocrates, like Thucydides and Plato, envisioned democracy as triangulated between historical agents (men of action like Timotheus), public speakers (who tended to be fawning sycophants), and the demos qua mass

audience and decision-maker. If Timotheus can be regarded as a model, then (at least in the current dispensation) the men of action and the demos are both relatively *phusis*-driven, and so they are limited in the extent to which they can modify their behavior. In the absence of a mediating force, Timotheus and the demos will naturally come into conflict, and the outcome will be disastrous for both parties: Timotheus will be destroyed, and the demos will lose the benefit of a genuinely capable and thoughtful leader. The public speakers are the only leg of the triangle whose behavior is not fixed by nature, and so the only relevant persons truly capable of choosing how they will act. Thus speakers have a central responsibility in the *politeia*: reconciling Timotheus (and his analogues) with the demos. Modern public speakers do not, however, live up to their responsibilities in that they have given up their freedom of action by becoming mere flatterers of the demos and aggrandizers of themselves. As a result, Athens is now in a bad way; the best Timotheus can hope for is post-mortem vindication and eternal fame through Isocrates' verbal memorial, which will be circulated privately among elites. Yet the example of the great speakers/leaders of the past shows that this situation had not always pertained and suggests that it need not necessarily be the case in the future. The rhetors of the old regime had taken their responsibilities seriously; they themselves had been both persuasive speakers and historical agents. Since the old way had produced greatness and the new way produces disasters, Isocrates' reasoning leads the reader to suppose that the current system is worse than the old and is rightly regarded as a corruption of the former *politeia*.

According to Isocrates' logic, the corruption is (at least in part) the fault of the demos' excessive arrogance and preference for inferior men as leaders. But why, now that events should have made it clear to everyone how general were the disasters that accompanied the new approach, could the situation not be reversed? This question is particularly pointed given Isocrates' claim that his *paideia* was competent to produce the leaders that the better order required, men who were capable of both effective speech and action. In military skill and rhetorical education, Timotheus seems to be the equivalent of (for example) Themistocles or Pericles. Even his *megalophrosunē*, to which Isocrates attributes his downfall, might surely in other circumstances have been regarded as a virtue.⁴⁴ What went wrong?

Isocrates' ultimate answer to this pressing question was (explicitly or implicitly) engaged with key aspects of the analyses of other members of the critical community. First, Athens was simply too big, too populous, and "not properly intervisible" (*ouk eusunoptos*); that is, the citizens did not know one another intimately, and so Athenian gossip, "like a flood," catches up men and assigns to them the opposite of their correct reputation (171–72). This description recalls Plato's hostile description of democracy (above, 4.D.5). It is even more

⁴⁴ Of course, both Pericles and Themistocles were also punished by the demos at the ends of their careers (noted by Thucydides, 2.C above, and a major issue for Plato, 4.C.4 above), but their ultimate fates do not concern Isocrates here. It is not the historical figures, but their idealized ghosts that Isocrates presents to his audience.

striking as an anticipation of Aristotle (*Pol.* 1326b22–25, 1327a1–3), who asserts that the best possible state must be *eusunoptos*: small enough in geographic extent to ensure that its territory can be surveyed for enemy attack, but also, more importantly, small enough in population so that the citizens know one another's characters (cf. below, 6.E.1). For Isocrates, the current political situation was corrupt and not easily rectified because, as per Ps.-Xenophon, *hoi polloi* perceived the current bad order to be in their interests. Yet, while Ps.-Xenophon regarded the demos as rationally self-interested, Isocrates regards their opinion to be a form of false consciousness. The demotic error regarding their true interests was, in Isocrates' analysis, a direct result of the corruption of language: the slippage of referents from their natural (or at least traditional) objects that Thucydides had explored in horrifying detail in his assessment of the civil war at Corcyra and that Aristophanes had treated with devastating comic effect in *Ecclesiazusae*. Isocrates raises this issue in his discussion of "advantage/self-aggrandizement" (*pleonexia*)—an abstraction that is central to both Thucydidean and Platonic political theory.⁴⁵ True *pleonexia*, according to Isocrates, is not gaining by unscrupulous self-promotion at the expense of others (e.g., by robbery or embezzlement), but rather it is living righteously in respect to the gods and other people (282). Isocrates underlines this pious passage (with its echoes of both traditional morality and Socrates' doctrine of the necessity to avoid wrongdoing) by claiming that it is the very truth (*tais alētheiais houtōs echei*) and that

it is advantageous (*sumpherei*) to speak in this manner about such things, since as it is now there is such a degree of turmoil and confusion in the polis, that some people no longer use words according to their true nature (*kata phusin*), but they transfer (*metapherousin*) [the words] from the finest of objects (*pragmata*) to the most miserable of practices (*epitēdeumata*). (283)

As examples of the corruption of natural meanings, Isocrates cites the current tendency to use the term *euphueis* ("naturally gifted") for *bufoonspleonektein* (the verbal form of *pleonexia*) for the behavior of those who freely indulge their criminal impulses, and "philosophy lovers" (*agapōntas philosophein*) for those who had mastered the useless verbal tricks of the sophists (284–85). He complains that the corruptors of language (presumably, *imprimis*, Plato and the Academy) refuse the title of philosophy lovers to those who pursue and practice the sorts of studies that "make for wise governance, both in the private household and in regard to the common affairs of the polis." It is this end, says Isocrates, that should be the object of worthy toil, of philosophical study, and of every practical undertaking (285). Isocrates refers here, of course, to the sort of education he offered his own students. And he specifically accuses "you" (jurors) for turning the Athenian youth away from his sort of education, which would lead to good government in the home and in the polis, and directing the

⁴⁵ Corcyra and the corrupted language of *stasis*: Thuc. 3.82–84, with Connor, *Thucydides*, 100–102. A full treatment of the topic of *pleonexia* in classical Greek political thought is offered by Balot, "Genealogy of Greed."

youth instead toward partying and soft living generally (285–86). And thus the mass of citizens (and perhaps a significant portion of the critical community, who are included in Isocrates' imagined jury) is collectively implicated, along with the evil sycophants, in the corruption of language and the consequent decline of public and private mores that have led Athens to its current bad state.

The close association of corrupted language with corrupted mores was, perhaps, to be expected in the democratic polis, since Athens is, we soon learn, peculiarly a city of words: the Athenians, says Isocrates, are not best in war, or in political organization, or in preserving the *nomoi* of the ancestors, but rather they are distinctive and excel (*proechete kai diapherete*) in that which distinguishes humans from animals and Greeks from barbarians: "The fact that you have been educated better than any others in respect to practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) and in respect to *logoi*" (293–94). Indeed, the polis itself has gained fame as a school (*didaskalos*) for all those who would be masters of eloquence or its teachers (295). The comment of Thucydides' Pericles in the Funeral Oration, which made of Athens the "school of Hellas" on the grounds of the uniqueness of Athenian democracy and imperial prowess, has been appropriated (at some remove) for the construction of an Athens whose distinction hangs upon the sort of education that Isocrates offers his students. The revised explanation of why Athens is regarded as the school of Hellas pays off nicely in the context of the fictitious trial: Obviously, it would be madness to convict Isocrates of "corrupting" the youth when in fact, his form of *paideia* offers them the only really viable alternative to being corrupted (294). Moreover, by so doing, he was, at the same time, maintaining the greatness of Athens' name as the home of excellence in the areas in which Athens really could hope to excel: wisdom and speech.

By the end of the oration, the reader has in hand (to paraphrase a memorable public comment of then-President Richard Nixon, when turning over heavily edited versions of his White House tapes in the early 1970s) all the information she needs to find Isocrates innocent. If, having read the speech, we "vote" in favor of its author, the speech will have achieved its stated goal of clearing Isocrates' name and establishing the worth of his *paideia* and *philosophia*. But the *Antidosis* may also have suggested to the reader that a speech as monument is not enough. Once Isocrates has demonstrated that, rather than corruption, his approach to education offers the potential for amelioration of current woes, he has a very serious job in front of him. He is the (self-proclaimed) leading exemplar of the art of eloquence in a city that is peculiar and preeminent in its orientation toward *logoi*. It is the masters of *logoi* who are the key to a restored *politeia*—they enjoy both a good *phusis* and, as a result of their education, a certain freedom from *phusis* constraints. There has been a lot of damage done since the heyday of Pericles in that words have been allowed to slip from their natural and proper referents. Now it is up to Isocrates to repair the damage. It will obviously be through a persuasive *logos* that he will undertake to do so, a *logos* that will show his students and admirers just where the slippage in words has occurred and what the role of the leader/rhetor will be once the natural

meanings have been restored. The *logos* that undertakes this sacred duty is the *Areopagiticus*.

C. RESTORING THE *POLITEIA*: *AREOPAGITICUS*

Written either in the same year as the *Antidosis* or perhaps a few years before, the much shorter *Areopagiticus* is closely related to Isocrates' grand verbal monument to himself in its central theme of democratic renewal. Like the *Antidosis*, the *Areopagiticus* focuses on the model provided by the great rhetor-statesmen of the past. But the *Areopagiticus*, which takes the form of a sym-bouleutic address to the Athenian Assembly, goes into considerably more detail on the key issue of the corruption of language and is more explicit in its call for significant revisions in the Athenian *politeia*. Whatever their exact chronological relationship in the Isocratean corpus, the argument of the *Areopagiticus* follows logically from that of the *Antidosis*, picking up quite smoothly from where the other speech left off, but taking the next step of proposing constitutional changes.⁴⁶

The pseudo-symboleutic *Areopagiticus* begins with the claim that "many of you [Assemblymen]" will wonder why Isocrates has come forward to speak in regard to the public safety when Athens has a strong navy and numerous allies, and manifests other external symbols of strength and prosperity (1–2). He explains that these signs of the appearance of political health are misleading, even ominous (3–8). He confesses himself to be at a loss (*aporō*) to decide whether the demos' failure to recognize the "utter confusion" into which the polis has fallen is the result of a callous lack of concern for public affairs or should be attributed to a sort of stubborn blindness in the face of the facts (9). The underlying problem is quickly identified as a failure to adopt a sound policy for the conduct of the government (*dioikēsis*) as a whole. The Athenians should not be fooled by their recent short-term successes: these were to be attributed to chance or to the providential excellence of an individual leader (11); recent Athenian history is invoked to prove the point that the Athenians should not expect prosperity to abide for long in the absence of a well-constituted government (12).

Isocrates claims that lasting success has continued to elude the Athenians because they neither possessed nor sincerely sought to obtain a "correct (*or-*

⁴⁶ On pseudo-symboleutic rhetoric, see Lennox, "Isocrates," 6, 193–94; Bon, ΑΜΦΙΒΟΛΙΑ 170–73, emphasizing Isocrates' use of "double meanings" in order to avoid being labeled an oligarch; cf. below, 7.B. Notably the *Areopagiticus*, unlike the *Antidosis*, is a "seamless" fiction, in that it does not call attention to its own fictive nature. On the speech and its date, see further Mathieu, *Idées*, 126–51; Jaeger, "Date"; Lennox, "Isocrates," 195–206 (dating to 354). Wallace (*Areopagos*, 145–73, and "Date," dating to 358/7), notes the consistency in view between the two speeches, but argues that the call for constitutional change was precipitated by special foreign-policy circumstances. Too (*Rhetoric of Identity*, 36–73) discusses the ways in which Isocrates urges the reader to treat the corpus as a whole, a strategy that deemphasizes the significance of dating individual orations.

thōs) *politeia*,” one that would be capable of dealing in an adequate fashion with their affairs (12). They failed to make the appropriate efforts at reform despite the fact that “everybody knows” that lasting success abides only with “those who govern (*dioikousin*) their polis most excellently and most moderately” (13). Isocrates explains that success and good government are closely conjoined because the soul (*psuchē*) of the polis is its *politeia*. The *politeia* has a power (*dunamis*) over the polis similar to that of the mind over the body. And it is the *politeia* that necessarily assimilates to itself “the *nomoi*, the *rhētores*, and the private citizens” (*idiōtai*, 14). Here, in a passage strongly reminiscent of the central polis-soul analogy of Plato’s *Republic*, Isocrates establishes, in a neat rhetorical tricolon, the three key elements of his proposed constitutional reform: laws, rhetors, and the rest of the citizenry.

C.I. Dēmokratia Redefined

Having set the stage, Isocrates states his intentions succinctly: he proposes to speak in favor of the *dēmokratia* that was handed down by the Athenian ancestors,⁴⁷ the *dēmokratia* legally established by Solon, that “most demotic man” (*dēmotikōtatos*), and reestablished by Cleisthenes, who drove out the tyrants and brought back the demos (15–16). Isocrates assures his listeners that no system could possibly be found that would be more democratic (*dēmotikotera*) or more advantageous for the polis as a whole. The proof is that the old system succeeded in making Athens great and well respected by the Hellenes, whereas the present system has led to disaster (17–18). Isocrates’ speech is designed to allow the putative audience of Assemblymen to make their choice (*hairēsis*) and their binding decision (*krisis*) on the basis of “exact knowledge” (*akribōs eidotes*; 19). The general argument, the emphasis on the two original founders of democracy, and much of wording itself are very close to what is found in the *Antidosis*.

As in the *Antidosis*, an important issue is the proper relationship between words and practices or objects: those who governed (*hoi dioikountes*) in the time of Solon and Cleisthenes did not establish a *politeia* that was most communal (*koinōtatos*) and mildest (*praotatos*) in name alone, while revealing to those who lived under it that it was the opposite in practice. Nor did the earlier leaders educate (*epaideue*) the citizens to look upon intemperance (*akolasia*) as *dēmokratia*, or lawlessness (*paranomia*) as freedom (*eleutheria*), or unrestrained speech (*parrhēsia*) as equality in respect to the law (*isonomia*), or the

⁴⁷ On the *patris politeia* (ancestral constitution) debate, inaugurated by oligarchic opponents of democracy in the later fifth century, but immediately joined by democratic partisans, see Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty*, 337–411; Yunis, “Thrasymachus B1,” 62–63; Wallace, *Areopagos*, 131–44, 174–95, pointing out the absence of positive evidence for the debate between the late fifth century and Isocrates’ mid-fourth-century *Areopagiticus*. Much of the literature (well surveyed by Wallace) on Isocrates’ *Areopagiticus* discusses whether or not an actively antidemocratic political tendency among Athenian aristocrats (or, alternatively, “political moderates”) survived the collapse of the Thirty; I have attempted to shift the terms of discussion from “crypto-oligarchs” to “critics” in part because a continuous tradition of political dissent *can* be demonstrated.

license (*exousia*) to do whatever one pleased as prosperity (*eudaimonia*).⁴⁸ Rather, the governors of old established a polity that hated and punished men who acted according to these sorts of corrupt misnamings. By so doing, they made all citizens better (*beltioi*) and more dignified in their behavior (*sōphronesteroi*, 20).

The most important distinction of all, Isocrates contends in a familiar critical argument, was the correct choice between the two sorts of equality (*isotēs*). Rightly rejecting the definition of equality as giving the same thing to everybody, which entailed granting equal consideration to excellent men (*chrēstōi*) and scoundrels (*ponēroi*), the ancient leadership saw that it was much more useful to reward and punish each individual according to his individual worth (*kata tēn axian*). And this meant that they did not fill state offices by lottery (as in contemporary Athens), but rather they preselected those who were best (*beltioi*) and most capable (*hikanōtatoi*) for each magistracy. They did this in the belief that the others (the less-worthy citizens) would thereby come to reflect the character of those who were placed in control of affairs (21–22).

Isocrates defends the ancestral rejection of the political use of the lot as “more democratic” than the alternative, on the grounds that in a lottery, some of those who sheltered oligarchic sympathies would become magistrates, whereas in the case of the prior selection of the most worthy candidates (*hoi epieikestatoi*), the demos would remain authoritative (*kurios*) by choosing those who were most in favor of the established *politeia* (23). Thus, according to Isocrates’ system, the “governors” of the state would choose in advance a pool of excellent, worthy, capable men.⁴⁹ Then the demos would choose (presumably by open voting) from among those in the preselected pool. In Isocrates’ scheme, no ordinary (non-elite) Athenian would ever have the chance to serve as a magistrate; the role of the mass of citizens would be carefully limited to choosing magistrates from a predetermined pool, punishing those magistrates who failed to perform their duties properly, and judging disputes (26). “Management of public affairs” would be left to “those who commanded adequate leisure time (*scholē*) and who were possessed of adequate means.” These selfless elite leaders would be “like slaves” (*hōsper oiketas*), whereas the demos, for its part, would be “like a tyrant” (26). “And how could one hope to discover

⁴⁸ Schematic list of good versus bad terms (7.20):

GOOD	BAD
<i>dēmokratia</i>	<i>akolasia</i>
<i>eleutheria</i>	<i>paranomia</i>
<i>isonomia</i>	<i>parrhēsia</i>
<i>eudaimonia</i>	<i>hē exousia tou panta poiein</i>

Of these terms, *parrhēsia* is perhaps the most problematic for Isocrates; cf. 15.43–44 (a very positive use of the verbal form *parrhēsasomai*, likened to *alētheia* and forthrightness), 15.179 (you jurors must be patient with my *parrhēsia*).

⁴⁹ In the fourth century, it was assumed that the use of “preselection” for choosing Athenian magistrates (*klērōsis ek prokritōn*) had been introduced by Solon ([Arist.] *Ath. pol.* 8.1; Dem. 20.90); see further Badian, “Archons”; Hansen, “Klerosis.”

a *dēmokratia* more stable or more just than this one, which put the most capable persons (*dunatōtatoi*) in charge of public affairs, while making the demos *kurios* over these selfsame persons?" (27). Thucydides (above, 2.A.4) had focused on how conflicts between *dunatoi* and demos devolved into debilitating civil conflict; here Isocrates offers his own plan for conjoining the interests of the powerful and the many in a constitutional order that enables the former to rule with the consent of the latter.

C.2. Dodging the Oligarchic Tarbrush

The notion that Isocrates' managed system would be more democratic than a polity that made liberal use of the lot, on the grounds that the lot would sometimes fall on an oligarchic sympathizer, is remarkably specious, as is the idea that in such a system the demos would actually be so authoritative as to be "tyrantlike." Isocrates' comments point to and underline the rhetorician's obsessive concern to distance himself from oligarchy and his equally profound need to claim for his system the cherished title *dēmokratia*. These twin concerns are of obvious importance in assessing the force of his critical discourse.

The depth of Isocrates' fear that he will be taken as a crypto-oligarch is evident near the end of the oration.⁵⁰ Here the orator claims that certain of his associates, having heard Isocrates praise the "ancestral" constitution (apparently in private gatherings), advised him that "you" (the demos) could never be persuaded to adopt the "stricter" system he advocated. Moreover, they warned him that proposing the reform would lead to his being labeled a "democracy-hater" (*misodēmos*) and a partisan of *oligarchia* (56–57). Isocrates rejects this gloomy prognosis, pointing out that his proposed reforms were both traditional and open to scrutiny; none of his proposals required the establishment of the special committees or secret negotiations that were the hallmarks of oligarchic plots (58–59). A quick review of most of his previous *logoi* would, moreover, show that Isocrates typically condemned "oligarchic special privileges," whereas he had always praised "democratic equalities" – that is not to say, he quickly adds, that he had praised all democracies, but rather those democracies that were well ordered (60).

As an example of a well-ordered democracy of the past, Isocrates again cites the Athenian ancestral constitution. But for an example of a good democracy that exists in the present, he turns to the Spartans: "The Lacedaemonians are the best governed because they happen to be the most democratic (*malista dēmokratoumenoi*)." The proof of this (to most Athenians quite shocking) contention was that the Spartans paid more attention than anyone else to the ideals of equality (*isotēs*) and similarity (*homoiotēs*) – ideals to which oligarchies are,

⁵⁰ I am not making a strong biographical claim here: the "real" Isocrates may or may not have feared being labeled a crypto-oligarch (see, e.g., Bon, "ΑΜΦΙΒΟΛΙΑ"; Wallace, *Areopagos*, 170, 193), but the literary persona of his oration certainly did, and that persona is the means by which the real Isocrates inserts himself into the realms of discourse defined variously by the demos and by the climate of critical opinion.

according to Isocrates, invariably hostile but that are constantly put into practice by democracies (61).⁵¹ Here Isocrates performs a rather neat trick: he demonstrates his hostility to oligarchy by embracing the “laconophile” perspective that, in the *Antidosis*, he associates with overtly oligarchic tendencies. In that oration, the better sort of people had ultimately embraced oligarchic sympathies and embraced Spartan ways in the late fifth century, having been driven to this sort of ideological extremism by the slanders of democratic sycophants (5.318; above, 5.B.3). Now, in the *Areopagiticus*, Isocrates shows that a mid-fourth-century aristocrat like himself can separate the two tendencies: *oligarchia* remains highly undesirable, but Sparta can be recuperated and its traditional virtues appropriated within the bounds of the project of redefining *dēmokratia*.⁵²

To provide further proof of his hatred for oligarchy, Isocrates proposes to contrast the political order that pertained under the Thirty to the present Athenian *politeia*—a regime that “everyone criticizes” (*pantes epitimōsin*). When placed alongside the reign of the Thirty, the current regime seems positively divine in origin (*theopoiēton*, 62). Isocrates takes the opportunity provided by the contrast to launch into an encomium of Athenian democracy that borrows freely from the imagery of the traditional Athenian funeral oration (63–76). While continuing to emphasize the superiority of the ancestral democracy to its current manifestation, Isocrates makes it clear that democracy of almost any stripe is preferable to oligarchy (esp. 70). In this extended passage, Isocrates demonstrates just how thoroughly discredited oligarchy had become by the mid-fourth century, even within elite intellectual circles defined in large part (as I have argued) by their critical stance toward democracy. The relatively positive evaluation of the restored democracy of the early fourth century when it was placed beside the short, bloody reign of the Thirty is familiar from Xenophon’s *Hellenica* and Plato’s *Seventh Letter*. The contrast, which recurs in Ps.-Aristotle’s *Athēnaion politeia*, seems, at least by the mid-fourth century, to have become a staple within the critical community.⁵³ It was evidently employed as proof positive (to both elite self and demotic other) that criticism of democracy did not amount to a treasonous, poisonous preference for a regime that would sacrifice Athenian independence and engage in wholesale slaughter, forced exile, and widespread property confiscation.

The contrast “imperfect but bearable current regime versus intolerable regime of the Thirty” was extremely useful in defining the scope of the relevant terms in the ongoing debate over constitutions. If the practical choice of constitutional regimes (leaving tyranny aside) for fourth-century Greeks was between *dē-*

⁵¹ For a balanced assessment of Athenian “equality” and Spartan “similarity,” see Cartledge, “Comparatively Equal.”

⁵² This recuperation of the Spartan *politeia* (which recalls Xenophon: above, 1.n.70) recurs in a complicated form in Isocrates’ *Panathenaicus* of 339 B.C. (see below, 7.B) and in Lycurgus 1 (*Against Leocrates*), delivered before an Athenian jury in 330. For a history of the “laconophile” tendency in aristocratic Athenian thought and practice, see Tigerstedt, *Legend of Sparta*, 1: 148ff.

⁵³ Xenophon *Hell.* 2.4.41, with Dillery, *Xenophon*, 146–63 (the Thirty as a “prospective paradigm of the bad community that fails,” 147); Plato: above, 4.A.2; Ps.-Aristotle: below, 7.A.

mokratia and *oligarchia*, then limiting the concept of *oligarchia* to the sort of nightmarish excess that characterized the reign of the Thirty left a very wide latitude for the definition of *dēmokratia*. Indeed, that latitude was, in Isocrates' hands, wide enough to accommodate even Sparta. Isocrates is explicit in his desire for a change in the Athenian *politeia* (7.78: *metabalōmen tēn politeian*) and his conviction that the current regime is not rightly structured. Yet he does not call for a revolution, and he does not (as Plato had done) give different names to the bad *politeia* he hopes to get rid of and the good one he wants to inaugurate. For Isocrates, both the inferior current and the excellent ancient/future regimes are *dēmokratiai*. His distinction is put in terms of a democracy that is well organized and one that is not. The problem confronting the critic is to restore the pristine, ancestral meaning of what Isocrates (and probably many of his elite cronies) regarded as the only term left for legitimate government.⁵⁴

The implicit admission that *dēmokratia* and legitimate government were synonymous made it impossible for Isocrates to establish the totalizing "exterior" perspective relative to the rule of the people that is so striking in Plato's *Republic*. Rather than working back to and then forward from fundamental knowledge of reality, rather than attempting to ground politics in a secure apprehension of the world as it really is, Isocrates remained rooted in his society. Isocrates again portrays himself as (in Walzer's terms) very much an internal critic, one who sees his role as calling his fellows to abide by the best and highest ideals inherent within their own political tradition. For Isocrates, this entailed the difficult task of employing his rhetorical *technē* to square certain aspects of existing democratic attitudes and patterns of normative behavior with some of the ideals maintained in the symposiastic culture of Greek aristocrats.

C.3. *Hierarchy, Patronage, and Oversight*

Isocrates' driving concern in the political program outlined in the *Areopagiticus* was to reestablish fixed and reliable hierarchies. The mass of citizens needed to be recalled to their former respect for the traditional aristocratic virtues of moral excellence, wealth, high birth, and age (55). Those few persons who combined these several desirable characteristics would naturally be the "governors" of society. According to Isocrates, in ancient Athens, these pillars of society had constituted the council that met on the Areopagus, and that council had been the linchpin of the ancestral democracy (37–38). The ancestral Areopagites had not governed by means of a highly detailed law code. Indeed, the ancient Areopagites had firm opinions on the subject of the law code, regarding as simply ignorant (*agnoein*) those who held that the best citizens were produced by a code of law laid out in the greatest precision (*akribeia*). Here, putative ancestral customs are obviously being enlisted as Isocrates' comrades in the contemporary critical debate on political education. Instead of detailed laws, Isocrates' ancient Areopagites fostered virtue (*aretē*) among the citizenry

⁵⁴ Cf. Petrey, *Revolution and Realism*, 193: "A verbal form alien to dominant discourse takes legitimacy from its appeal to a different historical moment producing different rules for what words can do" (Petrey's context is a passage from Zola's *Germinal*).

by everyday habits of behavior (*epitēdeumata*, 39–40). In this preference for normative social control over highly detailed legal prescription, Isocrates' Areopagites, while frowning on the hyperlegalistic schemes typical of Plato's late political works, share concerns not only with Plato's philosopher-rulers of the *Republic* and with Aristotle of *Politics*, Book 7 (below, 6.E), but also with the Athenian demos: like the real fourth-century demos, Isocrates' imagined Areopagites ruled Athens through the establishment and maintenance of an ideological climate of opinion and its associated patterns of behavior.

If the method of rule employed by the ancient Areopagites resembled that of the contemporary demos, the outcomes were quite different. The fourth-century demos was concerned with deploying political equality to guarantee that the effects of social inequalities among citizens remained limited. In Isocrates' vision, the political order of ancient Athens had rested upon the demos' acceptance of profound social inequalities as completely legitimate. As a result of this internalization of social hierarchy on the part of the demos, political life and private life, politics and society were isomorphic and mutually sustaining (31). The society, and thus the politics, of Isocrates' ideal Athens were grounded in firmly established and universally accepted relationships of patronage and clientage: Poorer citizens felt no envy of their wealthier fellows; indeed, they regarded the prosperity (*eudaimonia*) of the upper classes as a guarantee of their own material well-being (*euporia*). On the other side, the rich looked after their poor fellow citizens by offering land at modest rents, by sending certain people out to engage in commerce, and by setting up others in suitable crafts (31–32). Isocrates explains that this benevolent paternalism on the part of the rich was not mere altruism but prudent investment, since the wealthy elite knew that demotic jurors would judge property disputes according to the law rather than allowing a misguided sense of equity affect their decisions. The old-time Athenian jurors had treated those who defaulted on loans with severity, and in so doing, their behavior, too, was rationally self-interested: the jurors (i.e., the mass of citizens) realized that if decisions went against the rich, the latter would withhold credit from the poor. This, according to Isocrates, would not much inconvenience the wealthy (who could evidently invest their money elsewhere), “whereas if the poor should lack the aid of those who supported them, they would be reduced to desperate need” (33–34). The happy result of everyone acting rationally within a social hierarchy maintained by raw property-power was that (unlike the distressing modern situation described in the *Antidosis*) no Athenian attempted to hide his wealth. Ownership of property was left securely in the hands of the rightful owners, but all citizens benefited from it in common (35).⁵⁵

Because of the ideological effects of internalized social hierarchy, reinforced by the constant threat of starvation, the demos imagined in the *Areopagiticus*' pseudo-history was effectively barred from acting as a collectivity with a will

⁵⁵ For a modern analogy, see Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 13–14: a similarly misty-eyed depiction of an aristocratic past in which grateful peasants accept benefits from a benevolent nobility.

of its own. This left the problem of the occasional aberrant individual, but if any ancient Athenian threatened to get out of line, he was quickly detected and ruthlessly disciplined. The Areopagus council ensured the maintenance of the established social norms by relentless oversight of the behavior of all citizens, and especially that of the youth (43). Areopagite paternalism included the assignment of occupations to each citizen: the poorer members of society were set to farming and trade; those with adequate means were led to devote themselves to the traditional aristocratic pursuits—horsemanship, athletics, hunting—and *philosophia* (44–45). The reader is reminded of the strict caste system of the *Republic*'s Kallipolis.⁵⁶ The countryside of Attica was divided into villages (*kōmai*) and townships (*dēmoi*) in order to facilitate the constant scrutiny (*ethēōroun*) of each person's life. This ensured that criminals were brought before the council and punished as appropriate (46; the *demos* retained only the power to punish misbehavior on the part of magistrates, not private citizens). It was by a combination of keeping guard (*phulakē*: again, shades of the *Republic*), strict judgment, and certain punishment of malefactors that the citizens were restrained from the tendency to wrongdoing (47). As a result of these salutary measures, the youth of old Athens did not waste their time in the excessive partying with flute-girls and gambling that characterizes their current practice. They avoided the *agora*, were hyperrespectful to their elders, and scorned buffoonery: “those whom we now describe as clever wits (*euphueis*) they regarded as sorry fools (*dustucheis*)” (48–49). This last sentence directly echoes the passage in the *Antidosis* (284) that links the decline in modern mores to the corruption of language. But the ideological is never far removed from the material: we remember that Isocrates' *paideia* was intended *only* for those students whose resources were adequate to provide leisure (*scholē*, 15.304).

The strictly enforced clientistic behavioral norms that characterized the society described in *Areopagiticus* would obviously have had the effect of obviating the residual democratic (by ordinary Athenian standards) features of the ancient *politeia*. Even if one granted that (despite the limitations on choice of magistrates) the control of elections and the power to punish magistrates rendered the *demos* authoritative in terms of its formal constitutional powers, Isocrates makes it perfectly clear that those powers could not be used to threaten the moral or social authority of the paternalistic elite of the wealthy and highborn: everyone knew that if popular juries got uppity and began to judge on the basis of equity rather than on the basis of the laws, the elite would easily crush their spirit by cutting off credit and thereby driving the poor into utter destitution. Mirroring contemporary depictions (sympathetic and critical) of fourth-century democratic Athens, Isocrates imagines a citizen-society for archaic Athens that is divided into well-defined mass and elite strata.⁵⁷ But there can be no doubt in

⁵⁶ And, perhaps, of Magnesia of Plato's *Laws*: despite their dislike of detailed law codes, Isocrates' Areopagites are rather reminiscent of Plato's Nocturnal Council (*Laws*, book 12).

⁵⁷ Hanson (“Hoplites into Democrats”) argues that the key to stability in most classical Greek poleis was a middle class (*hoi mesoi*), and that it is wrong to characterize Athenian society as divided into mass and elite. It is certainly true that in between the poorest Athenian and the richest

anyone's mind (imagined participant or reader) about who holds the whip in Isocrates' idealized ancestral society. The powerful instruments of social control assigned by Isocrates to his ruling elite ensure that the constitutional forms of democracy will in no way interfere with the elite's actual and ideological domination of society.

In sum, the useful word *dēmokratia* is retained in Isocrates' aristocratic utopia, as are certain of the legal powers of the demos, but the *dēmokratia* experienced by Isocrates and other fourth-century citizens was utterly shorn of its ideological and thus of its social and economic effects: the citizen masses, ostensibly in control of elections and legal decisions, remain in awe of the rich, who are therefore able to deploy (or threaten to deploy) property power without any ideological restrictions or constraints. This situation, advertised by Isocrates as at once ancestral and a feasible alternative for the future, is in many ways an inversion of the ideals promoted in genuine fourth-century orations delivered to the Athenian Assembly and people's courts. Isocrates realized—as did other Athenians, both ordinary and elite—that democracy qua formal constitution was a name without substance in the absence of a matrix of social relations conditioned by the demos' ideological control. Which was, of course, the point of the exercise.

As Isocrates describes it, Athens under the once and future *dēmokratia* was free from the modern evils of lawsuits, legal accusations, and special taxes on the upper classes (*eisphorai*: all quite directly associated with democracy), as well as from the general evils of poverty and war. The citizens respected each other, and the polis was respected by the Hellenes, especially because of Athens' defeat of the Persian enemy (ergo the good old days had lasted at least through the era of the Persian Wars, 7.51–52).⁵⁸ There was marvelous prosperity at home. Indeed, many Athenians never came to the central city even for festivals, preferring the enjoyment of their own private possessions to those public pleasures provided by the state. The ancient Athenian festivals were celebrated in a restrained fashion, and there was no competition in the sponsorship of festival choruses (52–53). Here, there is a strong, if surely indirect, echo of Ps.-Xenophon's (2.9–10) caustic description of the democratic tendency to trump private establishments by the construction of opulent public baths, gymnasias, and so on, and of his complaints about the forced expenses involved with liturgies. There is, one suspects, also an implied response to the popular rhetori-

there was a wide range of incomes and property holdings. My point is not that there were no "in-between" Athenians, but that Athenian citizen-society ordinarily considered itself to be socially bifurcated. Although the language of "the middle" had some resonance in Athenian public life, public orators and elite critics alike tended to focus on the distinction between many and few, *penetes* and *plousioi*. Cf. Ober, *Mass*, ch. 5; Plato *Rep.* 422e, 551d; and below, 6.D.1.

⁵⁸ Cf. 15.20–23: Athens' generally good reputation among Hellenes for gentleness and mercy (a reputation gained, as [Aristotle] *Ath. pol.* 40.3 [below, 7.A] makes clear, by the restrained behavior of the democrats following the overthrow of the Thirty) is put at risk by the "savagery" to defendants in the democratic courts. Plato (*Laws* 698b–701b) also dated the putative degeneration of the democratic *politeia* to the post-Persian War era.

cal topos, familiar especially from Demosthenes (3.26, 23.206–7), of an earlier Athens characterized by very modest private houses and highly impressive public edifices. Once again, Isocrates seems to be positioning himself within well-established critical traditions, and we are reminded of the extreme conventionality of his critical vision. With its focus on established hierarchies, patron-client relations, and “panoptic” oversight of public and private behavior, Isocrates’ imagined society recapitulates the everyday fantasies of upper-class polis Greeks, while his emphasis on the moderation and virtuousness of earlier generations recalls standard elements of demotic nostalgia.

D. THE RHETORICIAN AND THE DEMOCRACY

Precisely because of their conventional content, Isocrates’ orations are extremely important in helping to establish the intellectual context for the ideas of other fourth-century political writers. What makes Isocrates individually interesting as a critic of popular rule is his attempt to fit rhetorical practice and an education centered on rhetorical training into a well-established critical mode, a discourse that we now realize had retained much of its content from the era of Ps.-Xenophon, but that had also incorporated the more sophisticated analyses of the relationship between democracy and public speech typified by Plato and Thucydides. Education, in an ideological sense, is a major underlying concern in the *Areopagiticus*: *hoi polloi* of the ancient Athenians did not make a fuss about their exclusion from the magistracies because they had been “schooled” to be hardworking and frugal and to focus on their private affairs rather than attempt to reap rewards from the community (24). Indeed, the oration as a whole, like Plato’s *Republic* (and, *mutatis mutandis*, Aristotle *Pol.* book 8), centers on the various sorts of education that are appropriate to various classes of person and the beneficial social effects that would result from the “correct” ideologization of each segment of the population.⁵⁹

Yet, ironically, just as Kallipolis had no place for a critical Socrates, a “correctly” structured society would have no place for a critical Isocrates. An accomplished orator of the Isocratean type must be the master of eulogy and encomium, but Isocrates obviously regarded his own calling as transcending the artful expression of praise. According to Isocrates’ construal of the orator’s responsibility, it was his critical duty to call the attention of his society to its own faults, to how far it fell short of its own ideals, and it was his pedagogical duty to train orators who might help to make Athens (and other states) better. If the Athenians were already as good as they could be, if their practices lived up to their natures, Isocrates qua critic would have little of importance to say. Yet on the other hand, his attempt to describe a better Athens of the past fails to transcend a type of *dēmokratia* in which his students would have a continuing role: the persuasive public speaker retains a central place in definitive tricola in

⁵⁹ Harding (“Laughing”), who does not believe that Isocrates had serious purposes, reads the *Areopagiticus* as a satire on traditional education.

both the *Antidosis* (men of action, rhetors, mass audience, above, 5.B.5) and the *Areopagiticus* (laws, rhetors, and the rest of the citizenry, 14). And thus, Isocrates cannot escape the emphasis on pleasing a mass audience through speech, the very factor that other, less self-consciously immanent critics had identified as exacerbating democracy's failings.

Isocrates' criticism of democracy cannot aspire to the epic rejectionism of Plato's *Republic* because Isocrates' *philosophia*, the mastery of rhetoric that makes him into an outstanding person in his own eyes and in the eyes of others, is part and parcel of the speech processes typical of the democracy itself. That *philosophia* is therefore implicated in what other critics had argued was a peculiarly (or at least especially) democratic tendency to confuse brute facts with social facts, to collapse realities (*pragmata*, *praxeis*, *erga*) into *logoi* qua performative speech acts. As we have seen, Isocrates must criticize democratic practices if he is to be taken seriously in elite intellectual circles. But, given the implication of rhetoric in the democracy, it is difficult for Isocrates to attain any meaningful externalist perspective; even his wider Hellenic purview is delimited by his claim to be an Athenian patriot. Abjuring the epic qualities of Thucydidean history or Platonic dialectic, Isocratean *epideixis*, with its capacity for the employment and development of complex and various authorial personae, is well suited to the textual expression of the immanent critic, who must confront the conundrum that his social role and very identity are predicated on his continuing failure to persuade his fellows to undertake the meliorative reforms he advocates as desirable and feasible.

In a society that did not focus centrally on *logoi* and lacked a well-defined class of *logos*-makers, Isocrates would be irrelevant and would have no *paideia* to teach, and so would enjoy no fame, and could claim no special purpose for his profession. Thus, he necessarily celebrates, even while he criticizes, what Thucydides and Plato attempted to displace: the central role of the rhetor as crystallizer of public opinion in the construction of opinion, repute, and social reality through popular acts of speech and decision. Without the popular audience's ultimate authority over perceived reality, absent their desire to hear fine-crafted speeches, the rhetor (and thus, a fortiori, the teacher of rhetoric) would have no role to play in society. Mastery over *logoi* would be irrelevant, since facts would more or less "speak for themselves," and men of action like Themistocles would have no reason to seek out teachers like Isocrates.

Isocrates must express a preference for a state of affairs in which deeds trump words, since that notion had become a central tenet of the critical project, and indeed, part of the lingua franca of critical discourse. But at the same time, the rhetorician underlines the impossibility of that situation ever coming to pass so long as Athens remains a *dēmokratia*. And thus, the *Antidosis*, which poses as a defense before a democratic jury, provides an ideal forum: Isocrates is "forced" by the situation to show his audience that he is a loyal adherent of the democratic *politeia*. In the setting of a public trial before a democratic jury, he cannot be expected to contemplate the replacement of democracy with a *politeia* whose establishment might eliminate his own *raison d'être*. It is this self-

implication in the democratic system that is the necessary preliminary to Isocrates' attempt in the *Areopagiticus* to reevaluate the term *dēmokratia*. When placed next to the grand schemes of his critical predecessors, Isocrates' attempts at critical discourse inevitably seem thin to modern readers (if less aporetic than that of Ps.-Xenophon). This is at least in part because the content of his thought really is less original. But Isocrates is a master of form rather than content; he had no stimulus to develop truly original political ideas because he had no stake (indeed, quite the opposite) in challenging the speech-centered logic of Athenian democracy.

To what extent might this built-in "professional" reticence have distinguished Isocrates from other "quotidian" critics, those whose voices are now lost? No doubt there were in Athens some people who had no public ambitions and who wanted nothing more than to get on with their private lives. We might suppose that to the extent that these people were critical of democracy, they were unaffected by Isocrates' dilemma. But Isocrates was not *sui generis*. There were also many among the elite who lacked the wherewithal (cf. Isocrates' own claims regarding his own weak voice and timidity) to be full-scale rhetors, and yet who cherished the chance to make an occasional public display of their own special talents and virtues and those of their comrades. Actions in the people's courts and the chance to propose honorific decrees in the Assembly provided them with this opportunity.⁶⁰ The demotic public fora required that speakers adhere to prescribed forms. They were expected to mouth appropriate philo-democratic topoi in the course of their demonstration of their own high worth or that of the person on whose behalf they spoke. Isocrates recalls Plato's Callicles in voicing the complaint that democracy was homogenizing in its tendencies and imposed a drab mediocrity on all citizens. It is certainly true that Athenian democracy required speakers to adhere to certain demotic norms of public address. But, especially for those who could point to a record of philanthropy, the required level of adherence did not constitute a very tight-fitting straightjacket. Popular attitudes allowed considerable room for self-display once the norms of demotic propriety had been satisfied. There was much more room for public acts of verbal self-memorialization in Athens than there was in Sparta, for example, and perhaps more room than was allowed by most oligarchies, given their obsessive focus on maintaining "similarity" among the members of the ruling class. And thus, the close association between rhetorical display and democracy as an environment peculiarly amenable to the display of self through rhetoric may well have been a factor in the evident failure of the fourth-century Athenian critical community to evolve into or to provoke a genuine and dangerous political opposition to democracy. We will return to the question of whether this should be regarded as a failure in Chapter 7.

⁶⁰ Hansen (*Athenian Democracy*, 144, 271) suggests that at any given time there would be a pool of several hundred Athenians who had spoken occasionally in Assembly or had proposed an honorary decree, but would not be considered "politicians" by their fellow citizens.

Finally, it is not enough to compare Isocrates' mid-century orations with the texts produced by his brilliant predecessors, Thucydides and Plato, or even with other imagined quotidian critics. In his focus on the ways in which democracy could be "moderated," his displacement of the *demos* in favor of the "great man" as the primary actor in Athenian political history, and his insistence on placing Athens into a broader "Hellenic" political and cultural framework, Isocrates points the way for the important political treatises produced by Aristotle and the Lyceum: the *Politics* and the *Athēnaiōn politeia*. The question that we will now face is whether it might be possible for a highly original thinker to employ these resources (among others) in a way that would transcend the focus on the relationship between *logos* and *ergon* that had dominated Athenian critical political writing since Thucydides.

Political Animals, Actual Citizens, and the Best Possible Polis: Aristotle *Politics*

A. ARISTOTLE IN AND OUT OF ATHENS

The author of the *Politics* was not a citizen.¹ A native of Stagira, a northern Greek town on the Chalcidian peninsula probably destroyed by Philip of Macedon in 348 B.C., Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) arrived at Plato’s Academy in 367. He lived in Athens for twenty years as a metic, and then spent a dozen years as the guest of hellenized dynasts on the western coast of Anatolia and Macedon. Aristotle returned to Athens in 335 to found his own school at the extramural gymnasium known as the Lyceum. He fled to Euboea in 323, lest “the Athenians commit a second crime against philosophy” (Diogenes Laertius 5.9), and died the next year.² Other members of the Athenian critical community were also, one way or another, separated from actively participating in politics (below, 7.B). But for Aristotle, participatory political activity could *never* be more than an object of study. His formal separation from the real world of polis politics is particularly ironic, since Aristotle regarded politics as the highest form of practical activity, and the *Politics* remains the most important Greek theoretical discussion of the intrinsic value of participatory citizenship. All modern discussions of citizenship as a noninstrumental good-in-itself are indebted, if only indirectly, to him.³

¹ Greek text: W. D. Ross (OCT, 1957); translation with introduction and notes: Lord, *Aristotle: The Politics*. Commentaries: Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*; Schütrumpf, *Aristoteles: Politik*; Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*; Robinson and Keyt, *Aristotle, “Politics”: III and IV*. Fragments of lost works: Ross, *Fragmenta selecta* (OCT, 1955). Preliminary versions of some sections of this chapter appeared as parts of Ober, “Aristotle’s Political Sociology” and *Athenian Revolution*, 161–87.

² Until its conquest and probable destruction by Philip II in 348, Stagira was a member of the oligarchic Chalcidian League. It is possible that Stagira was restored by Philip in or around 342, when Aristotle became tutor to Alexander: Aelian *VH* 3.17, with Hammond and Griffith, *History of Macedonia*, 2: 519 n. 1. A few Athenian metics were made citizens, but this honor was normally reserved for those who had done extraordinary material benefices to the polis: Osborne, *Naturalization*, 4: 145–46. Aristotle and his uneasy relationship with Athens: Kelsen, “Aristotle”; Fritz and Kapp, “Development,” 130–34; Farrar *Origins*, 268–73; and esp. Strauss, “Aristotle’s Critique,” with literature cited. Aristotle’s period in Assos and Macedon: Hammond and Griffith, *History of Macedonia*, 2: 517–20; Brunt, “Plato’s Academy,” 294–99 (arguing that Aristotle had no influence on Alexander and, I believe wrongly, that Aristotle opposed Macedonian expansionism). The Lyceum: Lynch, *Aristotle’s School*, noting (93–95, following Jaeger, *Aristotle*, 316) that (relative to the Academy) few of these students were Athenian citizens and few went on to become orators or public figures, and that the school “depended from the very first on Macedonian rule.”

³ Highest practical life: Morrison, “Politics as a Vocation”; on the debate over whether contem-

Aristotle's critical analysis of democracy in the *Politics* was the enterprise of a remarkably well-informed "outsider" observer. Whether or not the 158 constitutional histories collected by students at the Lyceum were available at the time of the writing of the *Politics*, it is certainly a fair guess that its author knew more about comparative Greek political history than any other member of Athens' critical community.⁴ The work of Aristotle (and other members of the Lyceum; below, 7.A–B) marks a significant shift in the tone and the focus of Athenian political writing. But the strong connections between Aristotle's writing on politics and some of the central concerns of Ps.-Xenophon, Thucydides, Plato, and Isocrates suggests that it is worthwhile to situate political philosophy produced in the Lyceum within the context of the critical paradigms developed by earlier Athenian political thinkers.

A.1. *The Politics in Its Fourth-Century Context*

Read as a whole, the *Politics* is a highly original assessment of popular rule. It is also, I will argue, the most fully articulated program in the Athenian critical tradition for what might actually be done about democracy—in the real world and in the present or near future. Aristotle, the well-informed and well-traveled metic, managed to transcend the pervasive Athenocentric tendencies that had been criticized by Isocrates as typical of ordinary and elite Athenians alike. Yet the *Politics* is not an easy work to read. When compared to the polemics of his predecessors, Aristotle's political analysis seems to lack passion. There is in Aristotle little of Plato's visceral horror of democratic assemblies or his sharply satiric imagination—no vivid descriptions of the Assembly-place as a night-marish echo chamber or humorous asides about pushy draft animals.

The *Politics* reads very much like lecture notes; it is clearly not a polished text ready for presentation to an audience of readers outside the Lyceum. Its presentation of ideas is compressed and sometimes incomplete, featuring abrupt transitions from discussions of politics in the abstract, to descriptions of political realia based on observation, to recommendations for the "best possible" regime. I will, however, argue that the text as we have it forms a coherent whole and that the traditional order of the books makes sense—whether or not this is the order intended by Aristotle, or the order in which they were originally composed. The text becomes somewhat less rebarbative when it is replaced in its contemporary context. Since Aristotle mentions the circumstances

plation is a noncompatible higher good, see below, 7.n.33. Modern discussions: see, for example, Dahl, *Democracy*, 25–26, who places Aristotle at the beginning of the tradition of "aristocratic republicanism." Aristotle is especially important for "communitarian" political theorists; e.g., Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 433–34; Beiner, *Political Judgment*; Bell, *Communitarianism*, with literature cited.

⁴ Cf. Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*: xii: "Aristotle's political theory is . . . thoroughly saturated with the opinions and institutions of his own day and their historical origins." On the collection of constitutions, see below, 6.n.12. M. H. Hansen (personal communication) points out that of some 270 historical examples in the *Politics*, some thirty concern Athens.

attending the death of Philip of Macedon in 336 B.C. (1311b1–3) and two incidents most probably dated to 333 B.C. (1270b7–13, 1272b19–22), it is reasonable to suppose that the author of the *Politics* was aware of Greco-Macedonian developments of the mid-330s B.C.—by which time the Macedonian king had established political hegemony over Greece and, with an army composed of Macedonians and Greeks, had begun the conquest of Asia.⁵

Greeks had long coveted the fertile lands of western Asia Minor, and various schemes for invasion and colonization of Asia had been proposed by members of the critical community—for example, by Xenophon in his mid-fourth-century account of the march of the Ten Thousand and by Isocrates in an open letter to Philip II of 346 B.C. An invasion of western Anatolia had been attempted by Xenophon's friend, the Spartan king Agesilaus, in the 390s; he was driven out by Persian diplomacy rather than by force of arms. By the mid-330s, Greco-Macedonian conquest of significant portions of Asia seemed likely. In 337, following Philip's victory over Athens and Thebes at the Battle of Chaeronea, Athens and most other mainland poleis had been reorganized into a Macedonian-dominated "League of Corinth," which provided Macedon with a stable home front and military reinforcements. Philip's general, Parmenion, had established a beachhead in northwestern Anatolia in 336. In 333 Alexander the Great, Aristotle's former pupil, was campaigning successfully in western Anatolia. By 330 Alexander had burned the Persian capital at Persepolis, and the old Persian empire had ceased to exist. By Alexander's death in 323, a number of new Greco-Macedonian colonies had been founded in Egypt and Asia.⁶

After the establishment of the League of Corinth, it was no longer feasible to advocate revolutionary constitutional changes within existing poleis of mainland Greece. According to the league's charter, each polis was guaranteed the enjoyment of its existing government (in some cases after pro-Macedonian oligarchies had been installed); subsequent attempts at political subversion would not be tolerated. It was, however, quite reasonable to imagine that new Greco-Macedonian polis-colonies, each of which would require a constitution, would soon be created in regions formerly ruled by the kings of Persia. I will argue that, as he was writing the *Politics*, Aristotle found himself in a rare situation. Although fundamental political changes in existing states were now forbidden

⁵ An expeditionary force was dispatched to Asia before Philip's death; the main invasion came in 334, under Alexander. Of course, some parts of the *Politics* may have been composed considerably earlier than 333 B.C., and nothing precludes the work as a whole from being somewhat later. On the date of composition of the *Politics*: Jaeger, *Aristotle* (suggesting that some books were much earlier than others and thereby inaugurating a scholarly debate); Kelsen, "Aristotle"; Weil, *Aristote*; Schütrumpf, *Aristoteles: Politik*, 1: 39–67; Lord, *Aristotle: The Politics*, 13–17.

⁶ Colonization schemes: Xen. *An.* 5.6.15–16; Isoc. 5.20–23 and passim. Agesilaus in Asia: Cartledge, *Agesilaos*, 208–18. Greek-Persian-Macedonian relations from 337 to 323: Bosworth, *Conquest and Empire*. Cities founded by Alexander: Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 17–20; Fraser, *Cities*, which suggests that most of the new cities mentioned in our literary sources were not in fact Alexandrian foundations. But even on the most skeptical account (Fraser, *Cities*, 201, ultimately accepts only six actual Alexandrian foundations), Alexander must count as a great colonizer, as was his father before him; cf. below, 6.n.86.

by a credible superpower, critical political theory might still point the way to practical internal amelioration of existing regimes. There was, moreover, a second and more exciting prospect: the hope of influencing the internal political organization of soon-to-be-established Greek cities. Aristotle's simultaneous attempt to improve upon his intellectual predecessors and fit political philosophy into a practical framework—thereby solving the “democracy problem” — contributed to the development of some remarkable ideas. Some of these (for example, the “summation argument”) are strikingly philo-democratic, while others (notably the theory of natural slavery) are particularly obnoxious to modern readers. My reading of the *Politics* suggests that Aristotle's most and least attractive notions are equally important to his project.⁷

A.2. *Final Democracy*

Although Aristotle expresses sympathy for certain aspects of democracy, the *Politics* takes a staunchly critical stance toward democracy as it was currently practiced:

A fourth mode [of democracy] is when all [citizens] meet to deliberate on all matters, while the offices (*archai*) decide on nothing, but merely make preliminary decisions. This is the mode in which the fully realized sort of democracy (*hē tel-eutaia dēmokratia*)—the sort that we claim is comparable to dynastic oligarchy and tyrannical monarchy—administers itself these days (*nun*). (1298a28–35)

This “final democracy” (see below, 6.D.2, for Aristotle's four types of democracy) is an example of a deviant regime (*parekbasis politeia*), and it exists “contrary to nature” (*para phusin*, 1287b39–41).

Democracy as it is practiced these days is not even to be regarded as a *politeia* properly so understood (1292a30–31): All decisions are made by the assembled citizens as *psēphismata*, leaving nothing to be decided by the *nomoi*. The presence and authority of settled, fixed, substantive rules are at least part of what defines a *politeia* (below, 6.C.2). A government that relies on deciding anew on substantive law every time the citizens forgather is clearly without settled rules and thus cannot be called a *politeia*. Democracy is moreover corrupt because (as Ps.-Xenophon and Thucydides had previously argued) it is, in practice, the rule over the whole polis by a single “part” (the *demos* qua the mass of the poor) acting selfishly in its own interest and against the interest of other parts (1279b8–10). A third structural problem with democracy is that (again as per Ps.-Xenophon and Thucydides) when the mass of citizens (*to*

⁷ On “modern Aristotelians” and why their problems with Aristotle's doctrines on democracy, the psychology of women, and natural slavery (inter alia) are ultimately intractable, see Wallach, “Contemporary Aristotelianism”; Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 103–29. Yet the attempt to make of Aristotle a friend of (liberal, deliberative) democracy continues unabated: e.g., Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy*, 115–42; Salkever, “Aristotle on Equality”; Mara, “Near Made Far A way.” Aubenque, “Aristote et la démocratie,” emphasizes the philo-democratic parts of Aristotle's argument, focusing on his interest in deliberation and judgment, and his rejection of both Platonic “technocracy” and Rousseauian conceptions of the “general will.”

plēthos) rules as a collectivity (*pantes*)—rather than each citizen (*hekastos*) contributing to rule as an individual—then the *demos* becomes monarchlike and rules irresponsibly, as a collective tyrant. The nature of this rule is “despotic” rather than “political” (1292a15–17), and despotic rule has previously (book 1) been described as inimical to polis life. The ultimate source of each of these evils is the observed fact that in final democracies, all citizens, or at any rate too many citizens, do in fact participate in rule, and they do so all at once (as assemblymen) rather than in turns (as magistrates: *archontes*). Ironically, it is the generalized and continual fulfillment of the natural impulse of free males to participate in rule (below, 6.B.1) that ends in democracy’s not being a proper *politeia* at all. This undesirable “final” democracy bears a strong (if imperfect) resemblance to the political regime of fourth-century Athens.⁸

Political stability is generally regarded by Aristotle as highly desirable (e.g., 1288b28–30).⁹ Final democracy, however, was structurally unstable; it “could not easily remain in existence (*oute rhaidion diamenein*) since it is not well composed in respect to its laws and customs” (1319b1–4). And yet democracy of some sort seemed likely to become the only game in town in Aristotle’s day: “Now that it has happened that poleis have become even larger, it is perhaps no longer easy for any regime to come into existence (*oude rhaidion eti gignesthai*) other than a democracy” (1286b20–22). Thus, absent any new element in the equation, democracies will probably be instituted if and when big new poleis are created.¹⁰

If the larger poleis emerging in Aristotle’s day were “final democracies,” the prospect facing the contemporary audience of the *Politics* was grim: as new democratic regimes arose, the hope of living as a citizen in a polis governed by a regime that was just and stable would decrease. Since Aristotle supposed that citizenship should have a positive and substantive content, a careful consideration of possible alternatives was called for. But by the same token, if democracies were increasingly common, then the *Politics* must be deeply concerned with democratic citizenship. In short, the author of the *Politics* could hardly avoid being at once a student and a critic of democracy. Despite its putative instability, democracy was proving perversely successful in a Darwinian sense, and it evidently operated on a sort of political Gresham’s Law: the “bad” (corrupt, unnatural) regime was tending to drive out “better” alternatives.¹¹

⁸ Strauss, “Aristotle’s Critique,” 213–17; Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, 71. Contra: Todd, “Lady,” 155.

⁹ Cf. Fritz and Kapp, “Development,” 128; Bodeüs, “Durée des régimes” and “Law and the Regime,” 235–36; and below, 6.B.2.

¹⁰ Ruschenbusch (“Zahl der griechischen Staaten”) suggests that the “normal” polis was very much smaller in area and population than democratic Athens: as small as 25 square kilometers with a citizen population of perhaps 800, as opposed to ca. 2600 square kilometers and a citizen population of ca. 30,000.

¹¹ One might inquire into *why* poleis were getting bigger and (if they really were) what the relationship was between greater polis size and the relative success of democracy; the answer would certainly have to take into account the military impact of Athenian democracy on the Greek world. See below, 6.B.2.

Even if (as Aristotle suggests elsewhere in the *Politics*; below, 6.C) democracy is relatively benign and stable when compared with other existing and corrupt regimes (especially the worse forms of oligarchy and tyranny), the political situation “these days” was obviously unsatisfactory. The *Politics* seeks to elucidate, through an explication of the natural history of the polis, how such a situation arose and how it might be transcended in the relatively near future.

B. THE NATURAL POLIS: POLITICAL ANIMALS AND OTHERS

The arguments of the *Politics* are developed in Aristotle’s customary fashion—by a logical/empirical demonstration that takes as its premises the common-sense opinions (*endoxa*) either of respectable people (*hoi epieikeis, charientes*) or simply of most people (i.e., polis-dwelling adult male Greeks). These premises are then tested against observed phenomena. Aristotle grounds his argument about politics in three interlocking foundational premises: First, that which arises naturally from its beginning and achieves its final form (*telos*) is best. Next, a compound “whole,” once it has achieved its *telos* (i.e., once it has completed the natural process of developing from beginning to final form), is necessarily prior to each of its constituent “parts” (*merē, moria*, 1253a20, 1260b14–15). Third, in any complex whole (whether that whole be an animal, a human soul, or a political organization), there must necessarily be an authoritative, governing element and a ruled-over, governed element (1254a28–31). Thus, Aristotle’s understanding of politics is overtly foundationalist, naturalistic, teleological, and hierarchical—and not, on the face of it, likely to be sympathetic to the pragmatic and egalitarian premises and practices typical of Athenian democracy.¹²

According to Aristotle, the polis is a compound and natural whole, a society or commonality (*koinōnia*) composed of various parts. The polis aims at several ends: First (and fundamental, in that all other ends depend upon its attainment) is autarky, that is, the ability of the corporate whole to secure and defend its material needs without having to enter into any relationship with an outside entity that would compromise its independence. The polis is, Aristotle argues, the first and smallest human social unit that can exist autarkically.¹³ No social unit (individual, family, clan, village) smaller than the polis can be truly eco-

¹² The *endoxa* as opinions of either most people, most respectable people, or most wise people: *EN* 1098b9–12, 1145b2–7; *Topics* 100b21–23. See Owen “Τιθέναι τὰ φαινόμενα”; Keyt, “Aristotle’s Theory,” 268–69; Nussbaum *Fragility of Goodness*, 290–306; Schofield, “Ideology,” 6–8. On the question of whether Aristotle had the 158 constitutions (mentioned only in *EN* 1181b15–23) to work with when writing the *Politics*, see Weil, *Aristote*; Fritz and Kapp, “Development,” 129; Bodéüs, “Law and the Regime.” On teleological naturalism in the *Politics* (and its relationship to zoology, observation, and hierarchy), see esp. Lloyd, “Idea.”

¹³ *Pol.* 1252b27–30 with *EE* 1242a6–9; cf. Lloyd, “Idea,” 187–89. As is clear enough from 1257a28–41 and 1327a25–28, autarky does not mean a level of self-sufficiency that would obviate the need for inter-state commerce; see further Nixon and Price, “Size and Resources”; Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*, 67–69.

nomically independent. And thus individuals living in small social units (families, villages, clans) should have a natural impulse to combine themselves into a polis in order to gain for themselves the desirable condition of autarky that is the precondition to other, higher human ends. Once autarky has been achieved, the polis can aim at its second end, the moral good of “living well” (*eudaimonia*, to *eu zēn*, e.g., 1252b30). Moreover, for specifically political reasons (ones that the *Politics* explores in detail), no social unit larger than the polis (e.g., a kingdom or an empire) is likely to be able to achieve this second end. And thus the polis, the smallest potentially autarkic and the largest potentially “eudaimonic” social unit, is the ideal and most natural environment for human beings.

In order to understand how the polis arises and how it functions as a whole to maintain its autarky and to achieve the eudaimonic end for which it exists, Aristotle looked to the functioning of its component parts. Once the polis has attained its final form, each part should act for the good of the naturally prior whole of which it is a part, rather than its own individual, particular, and partial good.¹⁴ There are three main categories of “parts” of the polis. First in order of analysis in the *Politics* come kinship groups: families (*oikoi*), clans (*genē*), and villages (*kōmai*, book 1). Next come individual citizens (*politai*, book 3). Finally, there are groups or classes defined sociologically and in terms of their material interests (notably the rich and the poor: book 4). Membership in the various parts is, of course, partially overlapping; that is to say, an individual citizen is also certain to be a family member and may be one of “the poor” or “the rich.” But the overlap is only partial, because many residents of the polis (women and slaves) who are properly thought of as members of (i.e., “belonging to”) an *oikos* are not (and are unlikely to become) citizens. Such persons may be regarded as belonging to the polis understood as a society. But viewed politically, they can only be subjects of political authority; they are not shareholding members (or “parts”) of the polis understood as a state.¹⁵

Analyzing polis and *politeia* from the point of view of each part-category means slicing the same pie in different ways. One analytical approach will yield an exclusive focus on the citizen body and explicitly political activities, while another will encompass noncitizens and their various social and economic activities. Each of the three primary part-categories is the focus of a different book of the *Politics*; Aristotle assesses the various parts as he takes up different aspects of the polis as a society and as a state and as he proposes solutions to the various problems and conflicts that arise in the polis, due to its simultaneous existence as a social, political, and natural entity.

The first two part-categories (family: *oikos*; citizen: *politēs*) are essential to

¹⁴ This relies on the prior argument, developed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, to the effect that all action is naturally for the good and that the most authoritative good is the most complete good. See Depew, “Politics.”

¹⁵ On the gap between the “geo-polis” (all residents of the territory) and the “politico-polis” (the society of the citizens), see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 161–87. On shareholding, see Ostwald, “Shares and Rights”; Schofield, “Sharing in the Constitution.”

the existence of the polis. These first two part-categories seem not to be presented in any very strict analytical hierarchy; the essential and natural place and function of both families and individual citizens in the whole that is the polis must be mastered if the polis is to be adequately grasped in Aristotelian terms. In those terms, it is not desirable to seek to eliminate either families or citizens in political theory, nor (a fortiori) would it be feasible to eliminate them in practice.¹⁶ The third part-category, class-based group interest, is quite different. Sociological differentiation among citizens could, in Aristotelian theory, beneficially be eliminated in a well-ordered polis. For Aristotle (as, in somewhat different terms, for Marx), a major factor in social differentiation is the individual's situation within the mode of economic production.¹⁷ Some members of the polis must engage in labor so that others can be afforded the leisure necessary for the achievement of higher, eudaimonic, ends. But laborers need not necessarily be citizens; in Aristotle's view, it would be desirable to constitute "laborers" and "citizens" as mutually exclusive groups. The elimination of sociological subdivisions within the polis' citizen body would, in this view, help the polis to achieve its highest end by eliminating a source of friction and injustice. In sum, although families and citizens are essential parts of the polis and sociological interest groups are not, all three categories are linked by their common status as subautarkic parts that will be found in most (if not all) existing poleis. As parts, families, individuals, and classes should (although in practice they may not) subsume any sectarian or individualistic interests to the whole, the polis.

The consideration of the polis as a natural whole and as a compound made up of subsidiary parts leads to the major conclusion of book 1, from which the rest of the work proceeds: Man (*anthrōpos*: the individual human) is a "political animal" (*politikon zōion*) in the strongest sense, that is to say, by nature a polis-forming, polis-dwelling creature, one that achieves its natural *telos* only in a polis (1253a1–7).¹⁸ Free adult males are "complete" humans possessing the capacity and desire to deliberate; they are contrasted to children, women, and (natural) slaves, who are thought by Aristotle to be impaired in various ways. All "complete" men (as opposed to children, women, and slaves) should, by the argument, desire to live a "political" sort of life, which means they would tend to choose to participate with their fellows in working to further the good of the natural whole of which they are parts.¹⁹ This participatory and cooperative work

¹⁶ Aristotle's determination to maintain the *oikos* as a viable category sets him in opposition to Plato: 1260b36ff., with Stalley, "Aristotle's Criticism," 187–96.

¹⁷ For Aristotle's economic analysis and its relationship to Marxist categories of "class," see Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 42–69, with Ober, "Aristotle's Political Sociology"; and below, 6.D.1.

¹⁸ On the question of other "political" species and why for Aristotle man is "more political" (or "political in a higher degree") than other group-forming animals, see Cooper, "Political Animals;" with Depew, "Humans and Other Political Animals."

¹⁹ For Aristotle, this urge is simultaneously (and problematically) a matter of nature and of free choice (*proairesis*), and so the polis is at once a natural and a willed entity: Lloyd, "Idea"; see also Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*, 61–63 (with literature cited); Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 168–70.

is the activity of politics, and it is through engaging in political activity that men are complete. Men thus choose to be complete through political participation, and they choose to participate in politics because they are (relative to other humans) complete.

Women, slaves, and children, as “incomplete humans,” simply disappear from the picture in book 3, when Aristotle is analyzing the polis as a composite made up of individual citizens. In book 1, though, Aristotle discusses the family group in detail. The family is a “social” (although not a “political”) whole made up of husband, wife, children, and—in the case of wealthy households—slaves.²⁰ The discussion of the family in book 1 demonstrates that Aristotle assumes the continued presence of noncitizens in the social background when he is discussing the citizenry in book 3, and he specifically acknowledges that the social and economic contributions of noncitizens—especially women and slaves—are essential to the autarkic survival of the polis.²¹ In brief, many persons who are necessary to the existence of the polis are not shareholders in it.

The “incomplete” quality of those polis residents who were not adult males is defined by Aristotle psychologically, in terms of their impaired deliberative capacity (*to bouleutikon*); the proper situation of such persons in the polis is important to Aristotle’s conception of justice. Natural slaves are persons suited to slavery and incapable of ruling. Aristotle argued that slavery is “natural” in that, in the natural order of things, some people *should* be enslaved by others.²² The Aristotelian natural slave’s best interest, and worthiest purpose, lies in his being enslaved. He achieves his highest end (his *telos*) by serving those who are natural masters. According to the argument, a society composed of natural slaves and natural masters is just in a strong sense, since such a society furthered the good of each resident (i.e., each person who was either a “part of” or “belonged to” the polis) proportionately, according to his moral virtue. It was therefore superior to a society that might claim to be just in the weaker, utilitarian sense of maximizing the aggregate good of the whole society at the expense of certain of its residents, and certainly better than the society that systematically oppressed (i.e., denied the chance to achieve its highest end to) any social subgroup, however defined.²³

²⁰ At 1253b4, Aristotle states that the “complete” (*teleios*) *oikia* is made up of free persons and *douloi*. Yet as Saunders (*Aristotle, Politics I and II*, 72) points out, “On this showing, a good many ancient Greek households were incomplete.” Cf. 1252b9–15, 1323a5–6, where slaveless households are assumed.

²¹ Unlike Hansen (“Introduction,” 16–17, and “Aristotle’s Two”), who regards Aristotle’s analysis and definition of the polis in books 1 and 3 as conceptually discrete (even if complementary), I regard the two books as parts of a unitary analysis. See, in more detail, Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 161–63.

²² On natural slavery in Aristotle, I have found especially useful Mulgan, *Aristotle’s Political Theory*, 40–44; Schofield, “Ideology”; Smith, “Aristotle’s Theory”; Brunt, “Aristotle and Slavery”; Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 109–18; Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*, 73–83; Garnsey, *Ideas*, 107–27.

²³ See 1328a23–28: only citizens are parts of the polis; but cf. 1283b40–41: enactments should be correct in respect to what is “both to the advantage of the polis as a whole (*pros to tēs poleōs*

The relationship between Aristotle's view of the "natural" slave's place in society and his critical stance toward democracy is elucidated by Ps.-Xenophon's discussion of slavery at Athens. In Ps.-Xenophon's account (1.11–12, above 1.A.1), the Athenians assumed that the slave was psychologically *identical* to themselves; like them, he desired freedom, and like them, he would work hard in the self-interested endeavor to gain it. They make no systematic effort to distinguish themselves from slaves by their appearance, and this has the effect of limiting distinctive behavior in regard to slaves; for example, they may not may be struck at will. Ps.-Xenophon's democratic Athenians quite clearly regard slavery as a contingent, not a natural, condition. We will see (below, 6.E) how the sharp category distinctions demanded by treating slavery as a natural condition pay out for Aristotle in his design of a "best possible" polis, a society intended (*inter alia*) to avoid democracy's tendency to promote problematic overlapping between categories of persons and behaviors.

Aristotle's natural slave could be nothing other than a slave because he was simply incapable of deliberation; his soul lacked the deliberative element, and so he required a master.²⁴ The Aristotelian woman, by partial contrast, is capable of deliberation, but the deliberative element in her soul is (for unspecified reasons) not authoritative; thus she requires protection and authoritative direction.²⁵ Male children are temporarily excluded from shareholding; their souls are not yet fully formed, and so they are not yet able to form mature opinions and thus are unable to participate in deliberation (1260a7–14). They will be ruled in a "political" fashion by adult males until they are themselves ready to

holēs) and (*kai*) to that of the community of citizens (*pros to koinon to tōn politōn*)." The "whole city" whose advantage must be secured if enactments are to be just is thus not simply identified with "the citizens." Does Aristotle's "whole polis" (what I have called the "geo-polis") include women and slaves? I think the answer must be yes. Aristotle claims (1255a1–3, 1255b12–14) that natural slaves benefit from being enslaved. He admits that their benefit is slight (1278b32–37), but it is in proportion to the slave's slight possession of moral virtue: see Brunt, "Aristotle and Slavery," 366–71; Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*, 76, 102; Garnsey, *Ideas*, 116–19, 124. The strongest sense of justice requires not only the good of the *politai* or even the good of all adult native males, but the good of all those who naturally belong to the geo-polis. This does not include metics, but does include those who "belong to" native *oikoi*: slaves, children, and women, even if they are not "parts of" the polis as a state. Contrast Keyt ("Aristotle's Theory," 264), who includes slave-farmers among the mere "accessory parts" whose well-being is of no concern to the best polis of book 7; and Cooper ("Political Animals," 228–29), who argues that the community whose good is sought by the correct regime is limited to "all the free native-born residents."

²⁴ *To bouleutikon* (capacity to reason along with others regarding common goods) is not the same as simple intelligence. It is not that the slave lacked a rational capacity or was feeble-minded, nor was he completely without *aretē* (1260a33–36); see Brunt, "Aristotle and Slavery," 360–66; Garnsey, *Ideas*, 109–12. Schofield ("Ideology," 13–16) suggests that the proper analogy is the "childlike adult." One might go a step further and suggest the analogy of the "idiot savant" –capable of accomplishing impressive mental feats that seem to require reasoning ability, and yet incapable of actually looking after himself.

²⁵ Newman, *Politics of Aristotle*, 2: 218 glosses, "In women *to bouleutikon* is there, but it often does not get its own way." The dubiousness of Aristotle's reasoning (or its demotic analogues) is, of course, what gives Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* its punch. Presumably many Athenian men realized that their wives were just as "deliberative" as they themselves were.

participate in ruling. Adult males, women, children, and (sometimes) slaves make up the natural whole that is the *oikos*. As we have seen, Aristotle presupposes that every natural whole requires a ruling element. The only candidate for the ruling element of the *oikos* is the adult, free, male “head of family.” He will reign over the various elements (members) of his household as absolute master, as statesman, or as patriarchal quasi-monarch according to their several capacities (1259a37–b1). The argument thus far leads to an important conclusion: both the household ruler and the citizen participate in ruling, and they are, in practice and by nature, likely to be one and the same person.²⁶

Given that the polis was a compound made up at once of families and individual citizens, we are led to envision the citizen as a free adult male who was typically the master/ruler of a family unit. By extrapolation, the essential ruling element of the polis seems likely to be the group composed of all free adult males: possessors of deliberative ability with experience in ruling over the family and an impulse to use their natural gifts to promote the flourishing of the whole.²⁷ Notably, adult male metics (such as Aristotle himself) are left out of this picture: the polis as a natural entity has, it initially appears, no space for *potential* political animals (free adult males) who are denied the chance of fulfilling their political potential by virtue of their choice of a place of residence that is nonidentical to their place of birth. Nor (despite an extended definition of money-getting, 1.9.1256b40ff.) does the natural polis of book 1 initially comprehend the possibility that some native adult males would be excluded from political participation through extraneous sociological criteria, such as their lack of wealth or their need to engage in economically productive labor in order to support themselves and their *oikoi*. Rather, the natural polis would appear to take the form of a pristine (Greek-style) democracy in which all free adult males were participating citizens.

The discussion of the natural origins of the polis undertaken in book 1 leads the reader to conclude that *every* free adult male possessed an innate desire (as a natural part of the polis) to contribute to the flourishing of the polis as a whole and the necessary capacity (i.e., deliberative ability) that made it possible for him to contribute in a meaningful and specifically political way to that flourishing. In the absence of any obstacle, this combination of desire and means should result in political activity: participation in rule or government (*archē*). Since Aristotle regarded it as a mark of corrupt modern venality for all to desire to rule all the time,²⁸ the complete human, the citizen of the polis,

²⁶ Aristotle’s psychological hypotheses about women and slaves are not particularly tidy; see, e.g., Miller, *Nature*, 242–44, noting that “Aristotle’s evidence for these claims is very weak, even on his own grounds” (243). Aristotle’s psychology of rulership leaves adult sons of living (citizen) fathers out of the picture; their status was in fact problematic from the point of view of practical politics: Strauss, *Fathers and Sons*.

²⁷ This coincidence between rulers of households and rulers of the polis should not be overstated: it certainly does *not* mean that the polis is an *oikos writ large*. Aristotle explicitly states (1252a7–16) that the same person is not necessarily expert in political, kingly, and household-slavemaster rule. But here, at the beginning of book 1, Aristotle is discussing technical expertise, not innate political impulses or basic competence to participate in politics.

²⁸ 1279a10–16: “Previously, as accords with nature, they claimed to merit doing public service by

would expect to rule (*archein*) sometimes, and at other times to be ruled (*archesthai*) by his fellow citizens.

Archein/archesthai—the doctrine of ruling *in turns* (*kata meros*)—lies at the center of Aristotle's conception of the citizen and his relationship to the polis. A citizen was someone capable of ruling and of being ruled in his turn. Noncitizens are those who are by nature incapable of ruling, and so must be ruled at all times. With this doctrine, Aristotle establishes a premise that is of key importance to his critique of democracy in the Athenian style. *Dēmokratia* was predicated specifically on the *simultaneity* of ruling and being ruled. The Athenians tended to speak of rulership as based, *imprimis*, in the Assembly, where the demos was at once the subject and the object of authoritative decision-making: When the Athenian citizens gathered in Assembly and passed a declaration of war, this was the citizens qua authoritative demos giving orders to the citizens qua soldiers. The same citizens were, at one and the same time, rulers and ruled. Aristotle's conception, by contrast, imagines the central repository of rulership as the authoritative magistrate, who will hold office for a designated period of time. Like other critics of popular rule, Aristotle sought to subdivide and thereby to domesticate the unitary power of the people by limiting the active exercise of rulership to those thought capable of serving as authoritative magistrates. The impulse is familiar enough from modern theories of representative democracy, but quite foreign to demotic Athenian thought. Yet *archein/archesthai* doctrine also accepts a central premise of Athenian democracy: that to be a citizen means actively sharing in rulership, which means that there can be no category of the passive, permanently "ruled-over" citizen. And thus, Aristotle cannot take recourse in the modern "democratic elitist's" assumption of (and preference for) widespread political apathy.²⁹ Aristotle's best polis will exclude from citizenship those who are incapable of being authoritative magistrates, but this will lead to problems if the set of "potential magistrates" should turn out to be smaller than the set of natural "political animals."

B.1. Problems of Exclusion

The argument thus far runs as follows:

Humans naturally desire and expect to do what they are naturally capable of doing.
Adult, free males are (complete) humans, capable of participating actively in ruling the polis.

Therefore, adult free males desire and expect to participate in ruling the polis.

turns and [at other times] having someone [else] look to their good, just as, when ruling previously, they looked after his good. Now, however, because of the benefits to be derived from common [funds] and from office, they wish to rule continuously, as if they were sick persons who were always made healthy by ruling; at any rate, these would perhaps pursue office in a similar fashion."

²⁹ Mossé ("Citoyens actifs") points out that Aristotle's rejection, as a mere trick, of the hypothetical category of the permanently "ruled-over" citizen points to his tendency to elide nondemocratic practices and assumptions—and, we may add, therefore points to his critical engagement with democracy. Apathy and its modern proponents: Bachrach, *Theory*; Finley, *Democracy Ancient and Modern*.

Those capable of participating actively in ruling the polis are (in a natural polis) citizens.

Therefore, adult free males, as complete humans, are natural citizens, who desire, expect, and have the capacity to share in political rule.

If (with the Athenians) we further define participation in ruling by all adult, free males as democracy (below, 6.D.2), it appears that Aristotle's natural polis is a democracy. This conclusion leads us in turn to suppose that a restrictive *politeia*, one that systematically denies citizenship to categories of complete men (e.g., by property qualifications), will be chronically unstable. Those who are potential, but not socially recognized, citizens may be expected to struggle to bring their own nature and the existing political culture into balance. Indeed, this turns out to be precisely why Aristotle says that oligarchies are typically unstable; much of his discussion of oligarchy expands on this systematic instability and explores ways in which it may be at least conditionally ameliorated by those who seek to make a given oligarchy just as possible (5.6.1305a36ff.).

Moreover, a pristine democracy seems, by Aristotle's definition of justice (below, 6.B.2), likely to be a "correct" regime: In the *Politics*, "simple" justice is "the common interest." In a just regime, those who were citizen-rulers ruled in the interest of all (native) free adult males (and, by extrapolation, those in their *oikoi*); in a corrupt regime, the citizens ruled only in their own interest. By equating the citizen-rulers with the free adult males, pristine democracy equates the interests of the citizens (C) with the interests (i) of the free adult males (M), by the formula $C = M \therefore C^i = M^i$. And thus the communal self-interest of the rulers is identical with the interest of the political community as a whole, and justice does not require altruism. It is only when the citizenship group devolves into multiple sociological classes, each eager to pursue its own narrowly defined interests (i.e., when the *demos* is not "the citizens" but "the poor"), that democracy becomes corrupt (cf. 1279b8–10). In sum, pristine democracy is likely to be in accord with the demands of both nature and justice, whereas nondemocratic regimes are unstable and can achieve justice only if the rulers are consistently altruistic.

Aristotle knew that naturalistic theory and political practice never corresponded exactly; in no existing polis was there a full correlation between the ranks of natural and actual citizens. But some instances of noncorrelation were relatively unproblematic from the point of view of the potential "nature versus political culture" conflict sketched out above. The status of common criminals, whose citizenship was stripped from them through procedurally correct and substantively just actions of a legal body, is an obvious example. Such men were rightly deprived of an attribute they had demonstrated by their actions they did not deserve. Indeed, presumably criminals must be deprived of citizenship so that they do not have the opportunity to corrupt the regime by participating in it. Here the higher good of maintaining the polis' integrity would outweigh any problems that might arise from the dissatisfaction of a disenfranchised element in polis society (cf. Ps.-Xen. *Ath. pol.* 3.12–13). But the existence of criminals does demonstrate that the tendency of the part (the indi-

vidual citizen) to work for the good of the whole (the polis) does not lead to an inevitably beneficent pattern of behavior. The slippage between what nature “intends” and what men actually do (a subset of the unresolved conflict between nature as the ideal or goal [*telos*] and as that which is “usual”) is a central problem for Aristotle’s political theory. Men are demonstrably different from bees, for example, in that they may in fact choose to do other than what their nature prompts them to do. This disjunction between what should be the inclination of human males and their observed pattern of behavior underlines the necessity of imposing, through political means, cultural prompts and constraints, and points specifically to the need for law and education in even the best of regimes.³⁰ It also at least potentially opens the door to exclusions based on noncriminal, but morally reprehensible, behavior of other kinds.

Metics (and short-term foreign residents: *xenoi*) who lived in the polis were a second exception to the natural citizen/actual citizen correlation. Despite whatever discomforts Aristotle may have felt regarding his own metic status in Athens, this category of persons was not particularly troublesome from the point of view of his political theory. The metic resided in a foreign polis as a noncitizen voluntarily, and did not ordinarily expect to be made a citizen in his new home; presumably in many cases metics maintained citizenship in their own poleis. Thus the metic was unlikely to attempt to overturn the existing *politeia* in order to establish a new *politeia* that would provide him with access to participation in government. He stood outside the polis *koinōnia*; he might provide it with the goods and services that it required to achieve autarky (e.g., through acting as a merchant or by performing military duties), but he was not part of a citizen household or the political community.³¹

There remained, however, the question of why an individual who was by nature a citizen (in that he was a free adult male born into a polis) would *choose* to live a life that did not allow him to fulfill that nature. This question is bound up with Aristotle’s key distinction between merely living (*zēn*, what Charles Taylor has called “ordinary life”) and living well (*eu zēn*, 1257b40–1258a6): The former entailed an overemphasis on material goods—whether at a level of subsistence or of luxury; the latter meant (in political terms) fulfilling one’s *telos* as a political animal and contributing to the fulfillment of the *telos* of the whole of which one is a part by living the life of a citizen. When “merely living” replaced “living well” as the goal and end of human existence, then the natural impulse to limited acquisition (gaining material goods sufficient to assure autarky) was replaced by an unnatural impulse toward unlimited accumulation of wealth (1258a6–14).³² People driven by a desire for unlimited wealth would logically (although unnaturally) abandon

³⁰ Problem with ideal and usual in nature, and its association with law and education: 1310a15, with *EN* 10.9.1179a33ff., and Lloyd, “Idea,” 197–98.

³¹ Cf. 1260a39–40: the slave “shares his master’s life,” but the artisan (*technitēs*) is “further off” (*porrōteron*); the artisan in this case would seem to be a foreigner. On metics in general, see Whitehead, *Ideology of the Athenian Metic*.

³² Ordinary life: Taylor, *Sources*, 13–16; Aristotle on unlimited acquisition: Meikle, “Aristotle on Business.”

the polis in which they held citizenship for a polis that presented them with superior opportunities for acquisition.

Aristotle's own choice to live as a metic in Athens is not covered by the considerations noted above. His motive for leaving Stagira was certainly not to gain wealth, but to learn philosophy. Presumably (when viewed in hindsight) his choice was in accord with nature, and thus the *telos* of engaging in contemplation may in this case trump the *telos* of living as a participatory citizen.³³ But both the unnatural choice of the trader-metic and the natural choice of the philosopher-metic point to further limitations on the likelihood that the natural impulse of men toward political life will lead the polis as a whole to achieve its own *telos* without the willed intervention of human culture in the person of the legislator, lawmaker, or political expert. Moreover, the visible example of the man (whether metic or nominal citizen) who willingly embraced ordinary life at the expense of living well, and so aimed at acquiring unlimited wealth (and the shallow pleasures to which wealth gave access), could corrupt the polis by tempting other citizens to mimic his bad example. Those exposed to such "illiberal" characters might abandon their allegiance to the goal of living well as active participants in the political life of the polis.³⁴ In this case, the constituent parts of the polis would come to seek their own, personal advantage and cease to act to further the good of the whole, if and when it came to a choice between the common and the individual good. If this tendency were generalized, the polis could not continue to exist as a political entity. This issue of the potential rift between public versus private interests was, once again, a common concern of the critical community, dealt with in detail by Ps.-Xenophon, Thucydides, Aristophanes, Isocrates, and Plato.

A third group of men who were born with the potential to be citizens and yet were denied the chance of exercising their citizenship were those who had been unjustly enslaved, that is, slaves by circumstance who were not "slaves by nature" (e.g., Greek citizen-soldiers taken prisoner in the course of inter-polis wars). Such men would certainly and justly resent their unnatural servitude. They would bitterly hate the regime that kept them in slavery and would work to destroy it (implied at 1255b12–15). Consideration of this undesirable situation contributed to Aristotle's development of a sketchy doctrine of just war. Since that doctrine will figure importantly in my argument, it merits a brief digression here.

In an important passage (1256b20–26, cf. 1255a24–25), written in the context of a discussion of hunting as a "natural" mode of acquisition, Aristotle states that the only form of (offensive) warfare that is "just by nature" is an acquisitive military action aimed at enslaving those who "are by nature in-

³³ The conflict between the ends of contemplation and political participation as "highest" (e.g., 7.2–3.1324a5ff.) is a topos of Aristotelian moral philosophy. For a spirited and insightful argument that in books 7–8, Aristotle fused the two ideals, see Depew, "Politics," 348–61. Cf. Nightingale, "Aristotle," with literature cited.

³⁴ Preventing the corruption that *mimēsis* of *aneleutheria* entailed is a central concern of the educational program detailed in book 8.

tended to be ruled over but refuse" (*pephukotes archesthai mē thelousin*)—that is, "natural slaves" who are currently in an "unnatural" state of not being under the control of those who are, by nature, masters. The point is reiterated in book 7: training in war should be undertaken for three reasons: first, to avoid being enslaved by others; next, to gain hegemony over those who would benefit by being ruled; and third, to become master of those deserving of slavery (*to despozein tōn axiōn douleuein*, 1333b38–1334a2).³⁵ Under what circumstances might this third type of just war take place? In two notorious passages, once again in books 1 and 7, Aristotle suggests that there was a strong (though not an absolute) geographical/racial basis for his doctrine of natural slaves and masters. He suggests first (1252b5–9) that *all* barbarians are slaves by nature, since they possess no natural capacity to rule. On this ground he approvingly cites a tag from Euripides (*Iphigenia in Aulis* 1400–1401): "It is fitting that Greeks rule over barbarians," glossing, "since by nature 'barbarian' and 'slave' are one and the same (*tauto*)."³⁶ In the latter passage (1327b27–33) he suggests that Greek adult males, who were both spirited (possessing strong *thumos*) and intelligent, were, at least for the most part, likely to be rulers. Asians, by contrast, were intelligent and artful (*dianoētika . . . kai technika*) but lacked *thumos*; for this reason they remained ruled and enslaved.³⁶ At the very least, these passages

³⁵ The argument of the book 1 passage is predicated on the remarkable claim that, because nature makes nothing incomplete or useless, instrumentally useful natural slaves (creatures "made for" the use of other humans) may be justly acquired by "hunting" them. Smith, "Aristotle's Theory," 152, 154; Schofield, "Ideology," 22 n. 44; Garnsey *Ideas*, 113; Lloyd, "Idea," 192–93; and esp. Charles-Saget, "Guerre et nature," 105–10, discuss the association of this doctrine with Aristotle's general theory of natural slavery. Notably, Aristotle nowhere mentions the reverse scenario: a just war fought to free those who were unjustly enslaved. His focus on just offensive war as acquisitive—as a means to enslave those who "ought" to be enslaved—points to his focus on and hopes for Asian conquest.

³⁶ See below, 6.E. If we assume that these passages were written before the Macedonian conquest of Asia, there is an apparent discrepancy in Aristotle's account of barbarians and Asians: a barbarian cannot be an actual ruler (*to phusei archon ouk echousin*; 1252b6–7), and yet Asians "remain ruled-over" (*archomena kai douleuonta diatelei*, 1327b28–29); the question is, "ruled over by whom?" In the latter passage, Aristotle seems to reflect the common Greek notion that in Persia there was only one free man/ruler (the king; cf. Isocr. 5.139); in the former, he would deny even the Persian king the status of actual ruler, and must regard the Persian empire as a logical extension of the unnatural slave marriage, in which there was no true ruling element but a *koinōnia . . . doulēs kai doulou* (1252b7). Cf. 1255a31–36: a natural slave is a slave "everywhere," just as a wellborn (Greek) is wellborn everywhere. By contrast, the *barbaros* is wellborn only contingently (*oikoi monon*) and not generally (*haplōs*). I take it that Aristotle's Asians, while "everywhere" slaves, were "ruled over" by other barbarians only in a weak, contingent sense; but once they were conquered by Greeks, their nature and fortune would be consistent, and they would be ruled over *haplōs*; cf. Lloyd, "Idea," esp. 189, 201. If the two passages were written as late as 330 B.C., the problem disappears, unless (as many Greeks indeed felt) Alexander the Great must be regarded as a barbarian. Barbarians as likely natural slaves on Aristotle's account: Smith, "Aristotle's Theory," 151–52, and next note. The idea that different "races" possessed different moral natures (and that different climates were conducive to the development of character) is not original to Aristotle: see, for example, [Hippocrates] *Airs, Waters, Places* 12.12–13, 16.3–6, 23.19–21; Hdt. 9.122.3–4. The question is why Aristotle, ordinarily critical of ill-conceived and empirically dubious claims made by the Greek tradition and/or by philosophical rivals, uncritically accepts these notions (which do

lead Aristotle's reader to suppose that she would be likely to find a high percentage of natural slaves in "barbarian" lands generally, and especially in Asia. In practice, this could be taken to mean that Greeks might justly participate in a war upon at least some of the non-Greek societies of Asia, and they might justly use conquered Asians as their slaves. This consideration ultimately allows Aristotle's contemporary Greek reader to imagine that the "best possible" polis could be realized through the process of the colonization by Greeks of parts of Asia.³⁷

The final category of adult males ordinarily denied citizenship was the most problematic for Aristotle's critical argument. In every regime *except full democracy*, there existed a group of potential citizens: free, noncriminal, native adult males who were disqualified from participating in citizenship because they possessed inadequate property and/or because they chose to pursue a menial, mercantile, or artisanal mode of existence. The proper relationship of these men, who may collectively be called *banausoi* (artisans/merchants) and *thētes* (menial laborers), to citizenship is a particularly hard nut for the analysis of the *Politics* to crack.

On the one hand, even the poorest native laborers fulfilled all of the expected criteria of the political animal: they were, on the face of it, "complete humans," and they were also likely to be heads of *oikoi* and thus the authoritative rulers over women and children (if not over slaves). As such, the deliberative element was authoritative in their souls, and they had the experience of ruling over others. As we have seen, the (adult, Greek, male) possessor of this sort of soul and experience was naturally inclined to participate in governing the polis; he expected to participate, and he had the capacity to do so. But on the other hand, respectable opinion (which informed the premises Aristotle used in his analysis) held that working at trade or (a fortiori) manual labor was, by its very nature, so demeaning as to corrupt the soul and make its possessor incapable of ruling. Members of the critical community (in common with other Greek aristocrats) held that the exchange relationship implied by laboring for another (if not labor in and of itself) rendered the wage-earner a quasi-slave in that he was dependent upon a (pay)master for his sustenance. Moreover, his lack of leisure denied him the opportunity to develop political virtue and he was therefore unsuitable as a participating citizen. On this line of argument, many potential citizens should not be "actual" citizens.³⁸

not, on the face of it, seem to be *endoxa* necessary as premises to a philosophical argument). Schofield ("Ideology," 21–22, 27) notes both the banal conventionality of Aristotle's remarks on the slavishness of barbarians and Asians and his rejection of the contemporary idea that slavery was merely conventional (as opposed to natural) on the basis of his "deep hostility, bordering on incomprehension, of conventionalist explanations of anything."

³⁷ Garnsey (*Ideas*, 126) notes that the "discovery," in barbarians, of "a body of people who would do nicely as natural slaves . . . was a crucial decision, for otherwise the category of natural slaves might be thought of as entirely academic."

³⁸ Aristocratic opinions on the degrading nature of work: above, 3.n.66. *Banausia* in Aristotle: below, 6.B.2, with Miller, *Nature*, 244–45; Nightingale, "Aristotle."

The problem of potential versus actual citizens was not merely a philosophical conundrum. The theoretical problem of resolving the proper political status of the free workman was exacerbated by readily observed phenomena of Greek social history in the fifth and fourth centuries. Much of the discussion of books 3–6 (and especially book 5) of the *Politics* concerns *stasis* and its roots. While there are a variety of causes for civil strife, a particularly important and prevalent cause is politically motivated class conflict: Civil war tended to break out when the wealthy elite attempted to disenfranchise the poor by establishing an oligarchy. But civil war could also erupt when the disenfranchised poor agitated for the overthrow of a regime that denied them citizenship and struggled to institute a democratic regime free from property or occupational qualifications.³⁹

To sum up the argument thus far: Aristotle's natural history of the polis leads a reader to conclude that optimum stability and justice would result from a perfect correlation between actual and potential citizens. This never occurred in practice, since in every regime there were some native adult men who could not be allowed citizenship. Most categories of exclusion were not particularly problematic, but the political status of laborers and artisans was deeply troublesome. Excluding free, native *banausoi* and *thētes* from sharing in citizenship, from ruling in their turn, was regarded as essential by "respectable opinion." It would therefore appear that craftsmen lacked the genuinely free status essential to Greek notions of citizenship. But according to Aristotle's naturalistic argument and his empirical observations, such exclusions threatened the stability of the polis in a fundamental way, because free men possess a strong impulse to participate in the affairs of their polis.

Various nondemocratic regimes disenfranchised different percentages of the banausic/thetic population. In some cases, the number of the excluded potential citizens might be fairly low (e.g., in a "polity": 1297b2 –6). But if enough *banausoi* and *thētes* became sufficiently dissatisfied to engage in concerted revolutionary action, the sheer weight of their numbers meant that they might overthrow the restrictive, exclusionary regime and institute a democracy of the "final" sort. The upshot of these considerations seems to be that democracy, which Aristotle has designated as unnatural and unstable, is at the same time the most natural and most stable of existing regimes in that it most closely equates potential with actual citizens. Aristotle's teleological analysis is very much his own, but the relative stability of full democracy, as a product of its broad franchise, is an old problem of the critical community.⁴⁰ Ps.-Xenophon's text reached its aporetic conclusion at precisely this point: since democracy

³⁹ The general point is made at 1280a4–6: the fact that "few" are wealthy but "all" share in freedom is the cause of the dispute between democrats and oligarchs over the *politeia*. See further Ober, "Aristotle's Political Sociology." While the disenfranchisement of former citizens that attended the establishment might be only "partial" according to certain lights, Aristotle's definition of "unqualified" citizenship meant that those who did not enjoy full citizenship were in reality not citizens in any meaningful sense: "partial" citizenship was a mere trick; see above, 6.n.29.

⁴⁰ The relative stability of democratic regimes impressed itself on a much later admirer and critic of democracy: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, xiv (preface to the twelfth edition of 1848).

enfranchised virtually “everyone,” it was not easy to find enough disgruntled revolutionary activists to work for its abolition (*Ath. pol.* 3.12–13, above 1.A.3). Could Aristotle do better?

There is no simple way for Aristotle to work around the dilemma within his own terms: Denying free male heads-of-household an inherent status as natural citizens threatens to undermine the premises on which Aristotle’s establishment of the polis as a natural entity was predicated. Any attempt to claim that the nature-practice disjunction had few consequences in practice must run head-on into the empirical wall of historical data on actual political upheavals in existing poleis; the descriptive sections of the *Politics* (especially books 4–6) indicate how much of that data was known to Aristotle and how seriously he took it. Yet to grant *banausoi* and *thētes* the status of citizens was to acknowledge that democracy was, after all, the most natural of regimes. That would not sit well with Aristotle’s critical intellectual heritage. Moreover, since it entailed denying the collective opinion of respectable people (i.e., the educated elites who were the producers and consumers of the critical tradition), granting laborers a true share in the polis threatened to invalidate one of Aristotle’s primary analytic premises.

This, in brief, is Aristotle’s “democracy problem,” and it provides a context for a confusing passage: In the last chapter of book 1 (1.13.1259b18ff.), in the midst of a consideration of the moral virtue of members of the household, Aristotle suddenly turns to the issue of the virtues of the craftsman (*technitēs*)/mechanic (*banausos*) and makes the radical suggestion that this category of individual “has a kind of delimited slavery” (*aphōrismenēn tina echei douleian*, 1260b1) because “virtue pertains to him to the precise extent that slavery does.” Aristotle explains that the master/employer is the “cause” of virtue in both the (actual) slave and the (nominally free) craftsman.⁴¹ Here Aristotle seemingly suggests that working men were not in fact free in an unqualified sense. Yet nor were working men enslaved in the simple sense of being natural slaves. They occupied a troubling middle ground between the simply free and potentially virtuous leisured elite and the natural slave. They were psychologically complete humans and thus likely to act as free men in seeking a political role, yet they did not possess political virtue. What, then, was their proper place in the *politeia*?

Extreme oligarchs, like the Thirty at Athens, might attempt to suppress the political aspirations of unenfranchised native males by deception or main force. Yet such an approach has grave consequences for an Aristotelian analysis. It means that the polis would not be predicated on a general and reasoned acceptance of the justice of the established laws and customs. In Aristotle’s view, justice, defined as “the common good” (*to koinēi sumpheron*, 1282b16–18), was a good-in-itself.⁴² Moreover, only a just polis could be a stable political entity over time. Resort to deception and force to maintain a constitutional

⁴¹ Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*, 101–3, has a good discussion. Cf. below, 6.B.2.

⁴² Cf. *EN* 1129b14–19, 1160a13–14, with Miller, *Nature*, 194ff.

order against the will of the (potential) citizenry therefore means sacrificing the very *raison d'être* of the polis (see 1297a7–13). Without social and political stability adequate for long-term existence, secure reproduction of the *politeia* over time, the natural goal of the realized polis, could not be assured. Socio-political stability was essential if the polis were to achieve its *telos* of autarky and, at least potentially, of *eudaimonia*. And thus the demands of justice, autarky, and happiness all militated against a resort to deception and force.

Some other solution to the dilemma posed by the political status of the non-leisured would have to be found, and much of the *Politics* can be read as Aristotle's search for that solution. Different sections of the *Politics* offer several lines of approach: The polarized leisure/labor dichotomy might be broken by introducing a large, stabilizing "middle" element (1295b1 –1296a38). The rule of the middling citizens (*hoi mesoi*) is at one point called best (1295b34–35), although Aristotle notes that most actual regimes are democracies or oligarchies because *hoi mesoi* are relatively few (1296a22–24). Elsewhere, Aristotle suggests various ways of ameliorating the dissatisfaction of the disenfranchised through assuring them just treatment by the ruling class of citizens (1297b6–8, 1308a3–13, 1318b17–20). He attempts to solve the problem of distributive justice ("to each according to his *x*" –with "*x*" being defined differently by democrats and oligarchs) by devising a proportional formula emphasizing innate quality (e.g., 1318a11–b5). Yet each of these solutions is unsatisfactory as a final solution to the dilemma: The stability-ensuring middle element is apparently dominant only in the rare or nonexistent form of regime known as "polity." In any polis in which either the leisured rich or the laboring poor is preeminent, that class takes over the regime and runs the polis in its own interests. Therefore, "the middling regime (*hē mesē*) [i.e., the regime in which *hoi mesoi* predominate] has either never come about or has done so rarely and in a few poleis" (1296a36 –38). Guarantees of fair treatment were hard to fulfill, and those denied political power tended (rightly) to distrust promises made by their masters. Attempts to establish distributive justice in existing regimes faced the intractable problem of establishing a standard of equity that could be accepted by all parties.⁴³

In the end, Aristotle's most satisfactory solution to his "democracy problem" (from the point of view of his political theory and in light of the opportunities presented by the political situation of the mid-330s B.C.) is the construction in book 7 of a new polis whose population would be composed of three elements: a ruling class of leisured full citizens, a presumably metoikic artisanal and mercantile class, and a predominantly agricultural laboring force of natural

⁴³ On the problematic "middle element" and its rarity, cf. 1304a38–b4, 1309b19. Kelsen ("Aristotle," 189: "The rule of the middle class in Aristotle is only another word for the rule of the propertied class") is, I think, on the right track, insofar as the innovation of democracy was the full enfranchisement of men with little or no land who were financially incapable of serving as hoplites. On the problems of political "guardianship," see Dahl, *Democracy*, 52–79. Proportionate equalities/distributive justice: Harvey, "Two Kinds"; Keyt, "Aristotle's Theory"; de Romilly *Problèmes de la démocratie grecque*, 49ff.

slaves. I will attempt to show that this “best possible” polis –a democracy in that all potential/natural citizens were actual citizens, but an aristocracy in that all citizens were “good men” –was not only a philosophical construct meant to answer the challenge of the utopian political societies of Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws*. It was also meant as a general sketch (although certainly not a fully worked-out blueprint) of the *politeia* that might be adapted by new polis-foundations that Macedonian imperial energies and military efficiency would soon make possible in western Asia. And thus it was in part by reference to emerging circumstances external to the world of the existing Greek poleis that Aristotle attempted to answer the challenge posed by democracy’s “unnatural” success in regulating social conflict. But before turning to Aristotle’s aristocratic polis, we need to consider in more detail the relationship between constitutional regime and citizenship, between *politeia* and *politai* in democracy and other existing polis regimes. And we will also need to look at the role of monarchy in the international regime that (as I suppose) Aristotle imagined as a prior condition for the foundation of his best possible polis.

B.2. Regimes and Citizens

The primary forms of existing political regimes were, according to Aristotle’s quite traditional arrangement, tyranny (or dynastic monarchy), oligarchy, and democracy. Their “correct,” noncorrupt counterparts –true monarchy, aristocracy, and “polity” –were analytically very important to Aristotle, but evidently very rare or nonexistent in fact; they figure little in Aristotle’s description of currently existing regimes.⁴⁴ It is when it is compared to the other common and deviant regimes that democracy’s relative virtues are apparent: not only is democracy the only sort of regime that will easily emerge “these days,” but it is explicitly said to be more stable (*asphalesterá*) and less liable to stasis (*astasiastos*) than oligarchy, its main ideological competitor (1302a8–9). Moreover, oligarchy and tyranny are paired as the “shortest-lived” regimes (1315b11 –12); by implied contrast, democracy seems to be grouped with the presumably more long-lasting “correct regimes.” Given democracy’s likelihood of coming about and its relatively great likelihood of staying in existence for at least a while, it makes sense from an Aristotelian perspective to interrogate democracy’s degree of corruption: If it is likely to become the only game in town, can the game be made honest and worth playing? In order to qualify as a worthy regime, democracy must encourage, or at least permit, the polis to achieve its conjoined ends of autarky and *eudaimonia*.

Although Aristotle’s discussion of “final democracy” is, at first glance, not very encouraging (above, 6.A.2), there is reason to suppose that a democracy, which is, according to Aristotle, peculiarly well-adapted to the big-polis envi-

⁴⁴ Fourth-century sixfold scheme and its fifth-century antecedents: Hansen, “Aristotle’s Alternative,” 91 –93. Rarity of aristocracy and polity: *ibid.*, 94, citing 1293a39–42, 1296a36–38, 1301b40–1302a2. Aristocracy seems not to currently exist: below, 6.C.3. Cf. Yack, *Problems*, 3. I do not, however, accept that the “best regime” of book 7 is intended only as a utopia; see below, 6.E.

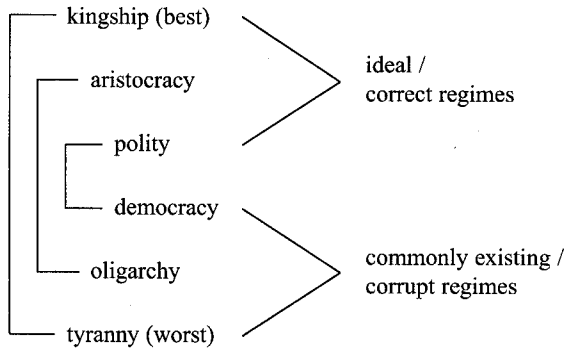


Figure 2

ronment of the modern world, will be able to maintain its autarkic position if the citizens are capable of controlling their acquisitive tendencies. A large democracy will, on the face of it, be more likely than a small oligarchy to command the requisite economic resources and muster military forces capable of defending them.⁴⁵ Thus, despite his strictures on “final” democracy, it is not surprising to find Aristotle describing democracy in general as the best of the three main varieties of debased regimes, each of which is the diametrical opposite of its ideal type: “Tyranny is the worst, and the furthest removed from being a [correct] *politeia*; oligarchy is second worst . . . and democracy is the most moderate” (*metriōtatē*, 1289b2–5). This hierarchical arrangement is set out in Figure 2.

Democracy, as the most moderate of the corrupt regimes, lies toward the middle of the chart. True kingship, which stands at the top, seems to be designated as the best of all systems of government, but this assumption will be challenged when Aristotle brings the claims of monarchy (as a polis government) into competition with those of aristocracy (below, 6.C.3).

If democracy is both the best and the most likely to arise of the commonly existing regimes, it makes sense that it be accorded special attention in a work that rejects Plato’s political theory on the grounds that his utopian regimes are simply unworkable.⁴⁶ The *Politics* asserts unambiguously the importance of studying not only the best regime but the current status of existing forms of political organization and the ways in which these forms, especially democracy and oligarchy, could be improved within their established constitutional parameters.⁴⁷ When Aristotle states that “one should study not only the best regime (*hē aristē [politeia]*) but also the regime that is [the best] possible (*hē dunatē*),”

⁴⁵ Cf. above, Chapter 2, passim; Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 63–69.

⁴⁶ Stalley (“Aristotle’s Criticism,” 198–99) points out that Aristotle’s approach was more practical than that of Plato and that his criticism is often on the grounds that Plato’s institutional reforms are impracticable; cf. Narcy, “Aristote devant les objections.”

⁴⁷ 1288b10–1289a25: i.e., without necessary resort to the *Republic*’s “rejectionist” call for total revolution and massive reeducation: above, 4.D.4. On Aristotle’s concern for the preservation of existing regimes, see above, 6.n.9.

and similarly also the regime that is “more easily (*rhaiō*) and generally attainable for all” (1288b37–39), he is speaking first of a philosophical ideal (the utopian tradition of Platonic Kallipolis), next of how that ideal can be made manifest in the world (i.e., the regime of *Politics* book 7), and finally of a range of moderate versions of existing regimes. Especially prominent among the last is “moderate” democracy. The claim that one should study the regime that is “easier” (*rhaiō*) to attain recalls Aristotle’s language when speaking of democracy as the only regime that will find it “easy” (*rhaidion*) to come into being these days (above, 6.A.2).

The relatively great prominence in the *Politics* of discussions of democracy, when compared to the other debased regimes, is not accidental. Some of the complexity of the *Politics* is a result of democracy’s intermediate status: as a corrupt but very common regime suspended between three uncorrupted but also rare-to-nonexistent “correct” regimes and two less moderate corrupt regimes, democracy is sometimes placed into competition with the better regimes above, sometimes with the worse ones below. In addition to criticizing “final democracy,” Aristotle appreciates the advantages in stability that derive from equality of access to citizenship. Moreover, he devotes considerable space to discussing some of the merits (actual and potential) of democratic decision-making techniques. The reader of the *Politics* may come to feel that, unlike Thucydides and Plato, Aristotle held that the advantage gained by its extension of the privileges of citizenship to all potential citizens outweighs any problems involved in the processes of democratic decision-making. Aristotle had considerable respect for some distinctively democratic institutions (notably ostracism, 1284b15–17), and he was willing to take seriously the possibility that some democratic assemblies could manifest practical wisdom, at least some of the time (below, 6.C.3).

Book 3 of the *Politics* begins with the assertion that in order to understand *politeia*, one must understand the polis, and to grasp the polis, one must grasp its component parts, that is (in this context), the citizens.⁴⁸ Aristotle then proceeds to develop a definition of the “citizen in an unqualified sense” (*politēs haplōs*) as a polis-dweller who “shares in judgment and rule” (*metechein kriseōs kai archēs*, 1275a22–23). Aristotle admits that one might want to query whether being an Assemblyman or juror really counts as “ruling,” yet this doubt is initially swept aside as ridiculous in that Assemblymen and jurors were those who wielded the greatest authority (*kuriōtatoi*). But it then transpires that the definition of the unqualified citizen as one who shares in judgment and rule may not suit the circumstances of all regimes; the answer to the question, “What are the powers and privileges available to one who is regarded as a citizen in this polis?” differs according to where the question is asked (1275b3–4). The ideal definition of citizenship that Aristotle had initially established (1275a32–33) is, it turns out, suited in practice “especially to a citizen in a democracy” (1275b5–6). The reworded definition is intended to exclude what Aristotle regarded as bogus forms of partial or limited citizenship, as practiced

⁴⁸ See further Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 163–67.

in some oligarchies: thus a citizen is “whoever is at liberty to participate as a partner in offices involving both deliberation and judgment.”⁴⁹

The fact that Aristotle based his first definition of the citizen on democratic practice and begins with a definition specifically suitable to a democracy is important for understanding the content and force of his criticism of popular rule. As we have seen, his consideration of the polis as a community of *oikoi* had pointed to some form of democracy as the most natural of regimes. Now it appears that Athenian-style democracy is his point d’appui for examining the polis as a community of individual citizens. This impression is strengthened by Aristotle’s subsequent statement that “as a matter of actual practice” (*chrēsis*, 1275b22–23), a citizen is a man descended from a mother and a father who were citizens. This “two-parent rule” had been written into Athenian law since 451 B.C., and the rule was formally restated after the democratic restoration of 403.⁵⁰

Aristotle then turns to the hard case of who is to be regarded as a citizen in the immediate aftermath of a political revolution. Here his example is the foreigners and alien slaves supposedly enrolled by the Athenian reformer Cleisthenes after the expulsion of the tyrant Hippias in 510 B.C. (1275b34–37).⁵¹ Next he takes up the question of whether one should speak of “the polis” or “the ruling element” as the performer of political actions. Aristotle’s example in this case is the general one of “when a democracy replaces an oligarchy or a tyranny” (1276a8–10). Aristotle then seeks to refute the claim that democracy (unlike other debased regimes) is immune to the charge of existing through domination (*kratein*) rather than for the common good, by pointing out that “some” poleis are run democratically in this same (domineering) fashion (1276a12–16). In sum, it seems beyond doubt that the claims of democracy were paramount in Aristotle’s mind as he wrote the three introductory chapters of book 3.

At §3.4–5 (1276b16ff.), Aristotle returns to the difficult problem of the *banauoi* and *thētes* and their relationship to citizenship. The problem arises in the discussion of the virtue (*aretē*) of the citizen and the sorts of knowledge he

⁴⁹ *hōi gar exousia koinōnein archēs bouleutikēs kai kritikēs*, 1275b17–20. Evidently the distinction Aristotle is establishing between the office of deliberating and that of judging (to the extent that it extends beyond a simple institutional distinction between those who attend the Assembly and those who serve as jurors) is based on freedom of public speech. An individual who has the right to affirm a judgment (perhaps by acclamation in a tightly controlled assembly), but no right to lend his voice in deliberations that lead to the making of actual judgments (because he is excluded from the relevant offices), might be called a citizen in an oligarchic regime but was not a true citizen (*alēthōs . . . politēs*, 1277b34); cf. above, 6.n.39. This sort of distinction does not arise in an Athenian-style democracy, with its emphasis on *isēgoria* and *parrhēsia*, although some persons (citizens between ages eighteen and twenty-nine) were entitled to attend the Athenian Assembly but not to sit as jurors. Cf. Schofield, “Sharing in the Constitution,” 840–41, arguing (against Miller *Nature*, 144–47) that the qualification is not a change in the actual wording of the original definition, but in its “interpretation or ‘determination’ (*diorismos*).”

⁵⁰ Athenian citizenship law: above, 3.n.62.

⁵¹ On Cleisthenes, citizenship, and the *diapsēphismos* of 510/9: Manville, *Origins of Citizenship*, 173–94.

must possess. After a preliminary discussion aimed at showing that the virtue of the unqualifiedly good man and the good citizen need not be identical, Aristotle states that the virtue of the “reputable citizen” (*politēs dokimos*) is regarded as the ability to rule and be ruled finely (*kalōs*, 1277a25–27). With the added qualification of “reputability,” Aristotle has excluded a problematic class of those who might be citizens, but were not regarded as respectable persons by the better sort of people. The identity of the excluded class of persons is soon clarified. Aristotle states that the political ruler is not expected to know how “to perform the subordinate tasks of a servant” (1277a33–37), pointing out that, since labors are various, “we speak of several sorts of slave (*doulou d’eidē pleiō*).” Manual laborers (*hoi cheirēntes*, people who live by using their hands) and the “banausic artisan” are among the sorts of persons who belong to this general “slavish” category. It is quickly apparent that Aristotle is not referring here primarily to persons who are juridically enslaved, but to those whose role in the mode of production rendered them the moral equivalent of slaves:⁵² “Because of this [their performance of slavish tasks],” among some peoples in the ancient past—“before democracy had become extreme (*eschaton*)”—those who worked for others (*hoi dēmiourgoi*) did not share in offices (1277a37–b3). The undertakings and achievements (*erga*) of such people need not be learned by the good man, the ruler, or the good citizen (1277b3–7). It eventually transpires that the virtue of the citizen is not knowledge of such mundane issues; instead, citizen virtue is political knowledge from the point of view both of the ruler over free men and of one who has been ruled as a free man by other free men (1277b15–16). In brief, then, many technical skills essential to the survival of the polis may be mastered uniquely by noncitizens: the citizen-rulers of a Greek polis need not know how to build a fortification wall any more than a modern American director of General Motors Corporation needs to know how to weld sheet steel.

But the problem of the *banausos* is far from solved: If only he who has the opportunity to share in offices (*archai*) is “truly a citizen” (*alēthōs . . . politēs*), and if *archai* are closed to the *banausos*, is the latter to be regarded a citizen or not? If so, then the definition of the virtue of the citizen previously developed by Aristotle is in error. But if the *banausos* is not regarded as a citizen, then what is he? “For he is neither a metic nor a foreigner” (*xenos*, 1277b33–39). Or is he?

Now on the one hand (*men*), in ancient times among some peoples the banausic element was slave or foreign, and for this reason many [*banausoī*] are such [slaves and foreigners] even now; so likewise (*de*) the best (*beltistē*) polis will not make a *banausos* a citizen. But (*de*) if this sort is a citizen, the virtue of a citizen, as we have been discussing it at any rate, cannot be spoken of as belonging to everyone [i.e., every citizen], or even to every free person, but only to those who have been relieved of necessary sorts of work. Those who perform necessary services for one

⁵² Cf. 1260a40–b1, with 6.B.1 above.

person are slaves; those who offer their services on the market (*koinēi*) are *banausoi* and *thētes*.⁵³ (1278a6–13)

This is a confusing passage, in which too much seems to be going on simultaneously: Why is the practice of ancient times contrasted with that of the best polis (with a *men/de* construction)? The passage seemingly works better if we delete the “best polis” clause and so allow “but if this sort is a citizen . . .” to answer “now in ancient times. . . .” And yet I do not propose the desperate expedient of emending the text to remove the “best polis” clause: the difficulty about what to do with the *banausoi* and *thētes* remains a knotty issue for Aristotelian theorizing about politics in the abstract. Yet Aristotle qua designer of a practical “best possible” polis has made his decision: *banausoi* (much less *thētes*) will not be citizens any more than they were in “ancient times,” and the citizenship of the best possible polis will be a leisured class.

As Aristotle then goes on to say, in all actual regimes the problem is taken care of by default. In some regimes, laborers and/or *banausoi* are excluded from the prerogatives of citizenship (both *thētes* and *banausoi* in aristocracies, only *thētes* in certain oligarchies); in other regimes (i.e., democracies), they are not excluded. And so, when speaking of realia, just as there are several sorts of slave,

it is evident from these things that there are several sorts of citizen (*eidē pleiō politou*), and that he who shares in prerogatives (*ho metechōn tōn timōn*) is particularly spoken of as the citizen . . . one who does not share in prerogatives is like (*hōsper*) a metic. But wherever this sort of thing is kept concealed, it is for the sake of deceiving the [excluded] inhabitants. (1278a34–40)

There is a strong implied censure in the last sentence quoted above: Aristotle does not approve of Kallipolis-style trickery of the lower-class inhabitants of the polis as a basis for a just regime. He states that many of those who wish to establish a correct regime (surely Plato is included among their ranks) err in that they deceive the demos and give too much to the wealthy. This “false good” leads to “true evil”; the general point is that the (deceptive) self-aggrandizement of the wealthy is more ruinous to the *politeia* than the (open) self-aggrandizement of the demos (1297a7–13).⁵⁴

The upshot of these considerations must be that a just regime either should grant citizenship to *banausoi* and *thētes* or should openly admit and reveal to one and all their meticlike status. Aristotle implies that restrictive regimes avoid this sort of public honesty for fear of the consequences: the resentment that might attend the open admission that some free men were “like metics” in their own land. And so democracy seems to be the most honest approach to political organization, and, implicitly as well as explicitly, democracy continues to rise to the surface of Aristotle’s discussion of citizenship. Yet we have also learned that the best possible polis (taking the *beltistē polis* of 1278a8 to be the *aristē*

⁵³ Reading $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\eta$ with mss. Π^1 and Π^3 , rather than $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\omicron\iota$, which is printed by Ross.

⁵⁴ See further Saunders, “Aristotle and Bagehot.”

“polis of our prayers” discussed in book 7) will in fact exclude *banausoi* (and presumably do so justly), and thereby will apparently offer a real sociological alternative to democracy. We are now approaching the crux of the matter of Aristotle as a political critic. The “best possible” regime was designed by the philosopher as an alternative to democracy, which was the “best corrupt” regime and the default choice for actual regimes “these days.”

C. WHO SHOULD RULE THE POLIS?

Aristotle now (3.6–7.1278b6ff.) turns his attention to the variety of possible regimes and the distinctions between them. The polis, as the reader has learned, is a complex whole and, like any composite (whether soul, or family, or city), must have a ruling element (1254a28–31). Because that element must be either an individual, or a minority or majority of the potential citizens, there are three basic types of regime. But each basic type (rule by one, few, or many) has a correct and a deviant version. Thus the *politeia* (the systematic arrangement of powers in the polis) may be dominated by a king (monarchy) or a despot (tyranny); by the virtuous few (aristocracy) or the wealthy few (oligarchy); by the majority of the hoplites (polity) or of the poor (democracy). The distinction between correct and deviant versions of the three basic types of regime is also clarified: uncorrupted regimes are substantively just in that they are ruled with a view to the common interest; corrupted regimes are unjust in that they are ruled so as to further the selfish private interest of the ruling element.

C.1. Oligarchy versus Democracy (Politics 3.8–10)

With the key distinction between ideal-correct and existing-corrupt regimes settled, Aristotle can turn to a more elaborate and precise definition of the two most common types of existing-corrupt regime. Oligarchy and democracy are defined, respectively, as the rule of the rich and of the poor (3.8.1279b11ff.). Remarkably, Aristotle here makes economic class not only his primary but his only formal criterion by relegating mere arithmetical considerations to the analytic bench: Even if there were a polis in which the majority were wealthy and the minority poor, it would be an oligarchy if the many rich were the rulers, a democracy only if the poor minority came into power. Of course, as he points out, this was rarely the case in practice, since in the real world the poor almost always outnumbered the rich.

The emphasis on democracy and oligarchy as defined by class confuses the straightforward “three times two” system of categorizing political regimes arithmetically (as the rule of one, few, or many) by introducing a distinction between formal (economic class) and practical (number of citizens in each class) distinguishing characteristics of *politeiai*.⁵⁵ Aristotle seems to be well aware that his analysis here is likely to be regarded as idiosyncratic. In order to clarify his

⁵⁵ See Mulgan, “Aristotle’s Analysis.”

position, he immediately (3.9.1280a7ff.) returns to the issue of the ends for which the polis exists. The definitions currently employed by democrats and oligarchs must be examined: “It is necessary first to grasp what they speak of as the defining principles of oligarchy and democracy and [to grasp] what oligarchic and democratic justice is” (1280a7 –9).

For Aristotle’s oligarchs and democrats alike, justice means fair distribution of partible goods according the principle “to each according to his *x*.” Yet what “they [oligarchs and democrats] speak of” in this regard is inadequate on two grounds: “they” fail to give adequate weight to “*x* = virtue,” and they place too much emphasis on the fair distribution of material possessions (*ktēseis*). The polis does not, however, exist for the sake of possessions, nor for the sake of ensuring through treaties and laws that people will deal honestly with one another in commercial exchanges of various sorts—even though these instruments of distribution do indeed make the material existence of the polis possible. Rather, the polis is a *koinōnia* in living well of *oikoi* and *genē* for the sake of a complete (*teleia*) life and autarky (1280b33–35).

Living well, then, is the end of the polis, and these things [material concerns and contracts] are for the sake of this *telos*. A polis is the *koinōnia* of *genē* and *kōmai* in a complete and autarkic life. This, we assert, is living happily (*eudaimonōs*) and finely (*kalōs*). The political *koinōnia* must be regarded, therefore, as being for the sake of noble actions, not [merely] for the sake of living together. Hence those who contribute most (*sumballontai pleion*) to a *koinōnia* of this sort have a greater part (*metestin pleiston*) in the polis than those who are equal or greater in freedom and ancestry but [who are] unequal [i.e., inferior] in political virtue, or those who outdo them in wealth but are outdone in virtue. (1280b39–1281a8)

We now realize that the formal class-based definition of oligarchy and democracy is an outgrowth of the overemphasis that oligarchs and democrats place on distribution of material possessions (i.e., living together under conditions of fairness) at the expense of furthering the higher end of promoting virtuous actions. Democracy and oligarchy are defined as the rule of an economic class because neither democrats nor oligarchs can see beyond the concerns of ordinary life. Aristotelian “simple” political justice, by contrast, takes into consideration the true ends of the polis as a *koinōnia* in living well, a community that exists for the sake of promoting virtuous lives rather than ordinary life.⁵⁶

Aristotle has, however, accomplished this demonstration through the potentially questionable move of lumping together the justice claims made by oligarchs and democrats alike and subsuming these rather uneasily conjoined positions under the general rubric of political arguments based on property relations:

If the poor by the fact of being the majority distribute among themselves the things of the wealthy, is this not unjust? “By Zeus, it was resolved in just fashion by the authoritative element (*edoxe . . . tōi kuriōi dikaiōs*)!” What then, ought one to say is the extreme of injustice? Again, taking all [citizens] into consideration, if the major-

⁵⁶ See Wolff, “L’Unité structurelle,” esp. 298 –302.

ity distributes among itself the possessions of a minority, it is evident that they destroy the polis But is it just, therefore, for the minority and the wealthy to rule? If they act in the same way and rob and plunder the possessions of the *plēthos*, is this just? If so, the other is as well. That all of these things are bad and unjust, then, is evident. (1281a14–28)

The “lumping and contrasting” move (material-oriented democracy/oligarchy versus an aristocratic focus on virtue) anticipates the discussion of the best possible regime in book 7, but it does not account for the recognized and experienced differences between oligarchy and democracy in the real world of classical-polis politics. By contrasting the essence of an “oligarchic/democratic complex” of ideas about distributive justice with simple justice as “the common good,” and by defining that good as the polis’ true end of promoting virtuous lives, Aristotle is able to assert that the virtuous deserve a “greater part in the polis.” And thus he can argue that only the truly virtuous should be “respectable citizens” in a correct regime. The problem remains, of course, that no real democrat would want to argue from the grounds Aristotle imputes to “those who speak” about democratic and oligarchic justice. If the regime dominated by the virtuous is to be defended as the best possible, it should be able to answer the actual justice-claims of democrats, whose *politeia* is regarded by Aristotle himself as more moderate and stable than that of the oligarchs or tyrants, and thus as the best of the debased and commonly existing form of political organization. Those democrats should be allowed to argue from the strengths of democracy alone and should not be handicapped by being made to carry an added burden of the oligarch’s conceptual baggage.

Aristotle claims that democracy and oligarchy involved the same potential for introducing destabilizing injustices into the polis, since the sociologically defined ruling element in each regime tended to use its power to gain an unfair share of property. As we have seen, the destructively self-interested behavior of the *demos* qua powerful subgroup within the polis is a commonplace of critical discourse, and the reign of the Thirty at Athens had demonstrated that “the wealthy few” were no better in this regard. Aristotle staunchly refuses to countenance property-redistribution schemes of the sort Aristophanes comically presented in the *Ecclesiazusae*. But he goes well beyond parochial complaints made by Ps.-Xenophon when he turns to the issue of enfranchisement. Here he points out that even the rule of the respectable (*epieikeis*) could become unstable, since all the others [i.e., all other potential citizens] would, of necessity, effectively be disenfranchised (*atimoi*) in that they would have no access to the prerogatives of office (1281a29–32). The rule of the excellent monarch was “more oligarchic yet,” since in this case everyone except the monarch himself was disenfranchised (1281a32–34). Nor was it a solution to replace the rule of a ruling element (*politeuma*) with the rule of law (*nomos*), since “if law may be oligarchic or democratic, what difference will it make?” (1281a36–37). Here again, the category distinction between correct and deviant regimes seems to slip: potential objections to monarchy are elucidated by a consideration of weaknesses in oligarchic and democratic approaches to justice.

C.2. Aristocracy versus Democracy (Politics 3.11–13)

The move from democratic/oligarchic injustices in respect to property redistribution to the problematically oligarchic disenfranchisements entailed by the rule of the respectable and (a fortiori) the monarch reminds us of democracy's great strength (the close correlation between potential and actual citizens) and thereby frames a confrontation between democracy and aristocracy. Aristotle defers discussing the possibility that oligarchs or tyrants should rule the polis, but "that the *plēthos* should be authoritative (*kurion*) rather than the excellent and few might seem to be [rightly] said and, while having a certain difficulty (*aporia*), also to be in some measure true."⁵⁷ Now the contrasting claims of democrats and aristocrats are apparently to be placed in direct opposition without the problematic intermixture of the oligarch's strong focus on protection of property rights. Aristotle proceeds, initially, to give very serious consideration to the sorts of claim that might be made (and perhaps were made) by sincere democrats in favor of democracy as the most just of possible regimes.

Aristotle begins with what really was the heart of the matter for fourth-century democrats: the "summation argument" –that is, the issue of collective, as opposed to distributive, virtue and wisdom.⁵⁸ *Hoi polloi*, while individually lacking in excellence,

nevertheless can when joined together be better—not as individuals (*hōs hekaston*) but all together (*hōs sum pantas*)—than those [the excellent few] . . . for because they are many, each can have a part (*morion*) of virtue and prudence (*phronēsis*, and on their joining together, the *plēthos*, with its many feet and hands and having many senses, becomes like a single human being, and so also with respect to character and mind. (1281a40–b7)

This point is demonstrated by what Aristotle presents here as an accepted fact: "The many are also better judges of musical productions (*erga*) and those of the poets [i.e., drama]; some [appreciate] a certain part, and all of them [appreciate] all the parts [the whole]" (1281b7 –10). The general point is that the collective whole (*dēmos/plēthos*), by aggregating the fragments of excellence possessed by individual members of a diverse multitude, can exceed the quantity of excellence achieved by any one individual—even though that single, virtuous man could outmatch any individual member of the multitude.⁵⁹ Aristotle acknowledges that it may not be the case that "every *dēmos* and every *plēthos*" exhibit

⁵⁷ 1281a40–42. The text of the *Politics* may be corrupt here, but the basic sense seems to be pretty clear, at least if (with Richards) we read λέγεσθαι (or εὔ λέγεσθαι) rather than the λύεσθαι of the codices. Leandri ("L'Aporie de la souveraineté") points out that the discussion of 3.11 –13 never manages to escape from this initial *aporia*.

⁵⁸ Centrality of collective wisdom for Athenian democrats: Ober, *Mass*, 163–65.

⁵⁹ For discussions of the summation argument, see Keyt, "Aristotle's Theory," 270 –76; Nancy, "Aristote devant les objections," 280 –83. Aristotle's optimism about the potential excellence of collective decision-making is supported by the empirical data for twentieth-century American public opinion assembled by Page and Shapiro, *Rational Public*. A similar position may be reached on philosophical grounds rather different from Aristotle's; see B. T. Raberg, *Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language* (Oxford, 1989), 47, cited by Eagleton, *Ideology*, 13–14.

this characteristic of collective excellence. But he defends his general point (or, he allows the democratic argument to defend itself) by pointing out that even if it can be demonstrated that some multitudes (e.g., groups of beasts) are not collectively excellent, “nothing prevents what was said from being true of a certain *plēthos*” (1281b15 –21). And thus the possibility remains that some democracy somewhere may exhibit a truly superior collective wisdom and collective virtue, and thus may have a real claim to being the best possible form of government for a polis.

Since he has set out the democratic argument for collective excellence with such admirable force and lucidity, we might expect Aristotle to continue with the argument for designating the demos as the ruling element and instituting a thoroughgoing (if not “final”) democracy: “Through these things [the foregoing discussion of collective excellence], accordingly, one might resolve both the question spoken of earlier [who should rule] and one connected with it—over what [matters] free persons or the *plēthos* of the citizens—these being whoever neither is wealthy nor has any claim at all deriving from virtue—should have authority” (1281b21 –25). But Aristotle does not present the democrat’s “resolution of these questions” —that is, the claim that, being collectively wise, the demos should rule over all important public matters in the polis.

Instead of developing the democratic argument, Aristotle subtly shifts the grounds, by considering how the legitimate claims of democrats to a share in political life might be conjoined with the convictions of respectable folk in regard to the distribution of major public offices:

For having them [i.e., nonvirtuous individual members of the *plēthos*] share in the greatest offices is not safe: through injustice and imprudence they would act unjustly in some respects and err in others. On the other hand, to give them no part and for them not to share (*metechein*) is a terrifying thing, for when there exist many who are *atimoi* and poor, that polis is necessarily filled with enemies. What is left, then, is for them to have a share in deliberating and judging [i.e., to be citizens according to the “revised definition” of 1275b17 –20, above 6.B.2]. . . For all of them when joined together have an adequate perception (*hikanē aisthēsis*) and, once mixed with those who are better, bring benefit to poleis . . . but each [inferior individual] separately is incomplete (*atelēs*) in respect to judging. (1281b25–38)

The original democratic argument has mutated considerably, both in point of view and in substance. The first point in this passage is that the democratic argument for collective virtue does not provide a basis for the claim of the individual nonwealthy, nonvirtuous citizen to have an equal share in the most important offices of the state. Although the reader might object that the democratic position is not allowed to respond to this challenge (e.g., by pointing out that, per Athenian practice, magistrates could serve on boards and thus maintain the principle of aggregating virtue), the point is a legitimate one within the frame of the argument.

But, more surprisingly, with the introduction of the “great offices” issue, the entire point of view changes to that of a somewhat pedestrian critic of democ-

racy—it is not the summation argument, but the merely prudential issue of the “terror” that must attend total disenfranchisement that trumps the argument for excluding ordinary citizens from all aspects of political participation. This is neither original nor profound; in dismissing the possibility of effective revolutionary action against the Athenian democracy, Ps.-Xenophon had pointed out that it is the disenfranchised who foment revolutions. Moreover, the claim to superior wisdom of the collectivity is, by the end of the passage, considerably weakened—now superior wisdom and virtue have been downgraded to “adequate perception” (the reader is reminded of Thucydides and Aristophanes), which will benefit the polis only if it is intermixed (Aristotle’s metaphor, which recalls Plato’s metals/souls myth, is a bulky impure substance alloyed with a rarer pure one) with the virtue of those who are naturally “better.” And hence the democrat’s claim to rule legitimately over the polis as a majority (not just to have a strictly circumscribed “share” in ruling) on the basis of the aggregated wisdom and virtue of the demos is never really answered.

A direct and decisive confrontation between aristocracy and democracy has once again been deferred. Poised (as I suppose him to be) between the everyday workability of Athenian political pragmatism and the grand model of Platonic political metaphysics, Aristotle now slips past the task of defending restrictive aristocracy against the claims of a strong democracy by turning around to defend his weakly democratic political “alloy” (mass participation in deliberation and judgment, tempered by elite monopoly on offices) against the Platonic position that the nonvirtuous should have no share at all in public affairs. In the process, the democratic position becomes still more attenuated: the Platonic argument from technical expertise may be wrong both because the user as well as the maker of an artifact (whether house or *politeia*) is able to judge its value, and “because of the previous argument [for collective excellence], *provided the plēthos is not overly slavish*—for each individually will be a worse judge than those who are genuinely knowledgeable, but all, when joined together, will be either better or no worse” (1282a14–23). Here two potentially important caveats have been appended to the summation argument. First, a collectivity may be disqualified from consideration in the debate over political virtue if it is “too slavish.” Per Aristotle’s discussion of slavery and slavish pursuits, this might mean that any *plēthos* composed primarily of nonleisured laborers and *banausoi* would be unable to attain collective virtue. And this would, in turn, exclude all real democracies on the Athenian model. Next, even an appropriately “unslavish” multitude might not actually be *superior* in decision-making to the accomplished few, but only “no worse” than a political expert or small group of experts. This addendum is important, since if the smaller group could be shown to be equal to the mass in wisdom and better in other ways, the claim of democracy of any stripe to a general superiority in respect to political virtue would be unsustainable.

Ascribing to Aristotle a fundamentally antidemocratic position on the grounds of his conditional “defense” of democracy against Plato might seem to be confirmed by Aristotle’s general conclusion on the question of who should rule and

over what: “As regards the first question, it makes nothing more evident than that it is *nomoi*—correctly (*orthōs*) enacted—that should be authoritative, and that the ruler, whether one person or more, should be authoritative with respect to those things about which the *nomoi* are completely unable to speak precisely on account of the difficulty of making clear general declarations about everything” (1282b1 –6). Aristotle’s reader has been brought to the crossroads between rule of law and rule of men before (1281a36–38), and again the problem arises that law is a cultural artifact and so reflects the particular political ethos of those who enact it: “If nothing else, it is evident that laws should be enacted with a view to the regime” (1282b10 –11). This time, however, the knotty issue is solved by fiat: “If this is the case [i.e., laws are enacted with a view to the regime], it is clear that those [laws enacted] in accordance with the correct (*orthai*) regimes are necessarily just and those [enacted] in accordance with the deviant ones, unjust” (1282b11 –13). The upshot of the extended discussion, which began with the possibility that the many should rule, is, apparently, that they should not: Democracy has been defined as a corrupt regime, and thus its laws (which should be the authoritative element) are necessarily unjust. Thus the regime is unjust.

But it is not quite that simple. Before announcing his general conclusion about law and justice, Aristotle had raised a related question: It is generally acknowledged to be absurd that inferiors (*hoi phauloi*) should have authority over matters greater than those dealt with by respectable people (*hoi epieikeis*), yet audits (*euthunai*) of officials and elections are surely great matters, and in some regimes the demos in assembly has authority (*kuria*) over all these sorts of things. And thus the poor, by “having a share in the assembly” (*tēs men ekklēsiās metechousi*), deliberate and adjudicate while the well-to-do serve as treasurers and generals and hold the great offices (1282a23–32). Yet, “perhaps these things too are handled correctly” (*orthōs*), since, once again, it is an issue not of the individual’s power, but of the collectivity’s:

Neither the juror, nor the councilman, nor the assemblyman acts as ruler (*archōn*), but rather it is the court, the council, and the demos [that is the ruler], and each individual is a part (*morion*) of these things just mentioned . . . so the *plēthos* justly has authority over greater things, for the demos, the council, and the court are made up of many persons. Also, the property assessment (*timēma*) of all of them together is more than that of those who hold great offices, whether taken singly or as a few. (1282a33–41)

In this passage, Aristotle seems quite clearly to have in mind the government of Athens, or at any rate a democracy on the Athenian model; he describes a situation familiar from Ps.-Xenophon’s ironic description of demotic lack of interest in holding great and dangerous offices (*Ath. pol.* 1.3). In democratic Athens, a combination of factors (both de facto and de jure) ensured that treasurers and generals (anyway) were drawn from a wealthy elite but the demos retained institutional control over its elected magistrates through strict account-

ability procedures and legal actions.⁶⁰ If this system could, even potentially, be regarded as being “handled correctly” (i.e., nondeviantly) from the point of view of justice, on the grounds that the agencies involved in election and accountability procedures were collectivities rather than individuals, then perhaps certain fairly “extreme” democracies were in some sense “correct” rather than deviant regimes. And thus the subsequent discussion about correct regimes and correct laws might not eliminate democracy’s claim to political virtue a priori.

The central question arises once again: If democracy is (speaking relatively and in respect to the world as we find it and might reasonably hope to make it) moderate, stable, successful, and especially well suited to the demographic conditions typical of modern poleis; and if there is a reasonable chance that applying the results of careful political studies (of the sort represented by books 4–6 of the *Politics*, for example) could have the effect of making any given democracy somewhat better (more like Democracy I, which closely resembled “polity,” and less like “final, extreme” Democracy IV ; see below, 6.D.2), then why should we not suppose that democracy is the best we can hope for in the real world, and why should we not put our energies into making it as good as it can be? “We,” in this case, would be the men of respectable opinions from whom Aristotle borrowed the initial premises of his argument and to whom (or to some of whom) he presumably addressed his work.⁶¹ Faced with a simple dichotomy, a choice between dreaming of Plato’s ethereal Kallipolis (and for many of Aristotle’s intended readers, the life of Plato’s philosophers and guards might appear more like a nightmare) or engaging in political activity as a citizen of what was acknowledged to be the most moderate form of commonly existing government, many of Aristotle’s contemporaries were likely to choose the latter course. They might choose to be active citizens of a democracy even if they did not particularly like democracy in general or the particular democracy under which they lived, and even if they found many democratic practices and attitudes distasteful. This is the choice that many elite Athenians made in fact.

Aristotle’s emphasis on the intractable problem of whether to include or exclude free native *banauoi* and *thētes*, and his acknowledgment of the potential validity of the summation argument suggest that (unlike Ps.-Xenophon) he did not regard as irrational or vicious the choice of many “respectable men” to accommodate themselves to democratic regimes. And yet his reiterated emphasis on the status of democracy as a corrupt, deviant, unnatural regime suggests that he did not regard Athenian democracy as anything close to the best *politeia*. When he is deploying the various arguments in favor of democracy, Aristotle’s imagined interlocutor, when it is not Plato, is a partisan of oligarchy. It is quite obviously against supporters of oligarchy that his striking point about

⁶⁰ The terms *boulē*, *dikastērion*, *ekklēsia*, *stratēgoi*, *tamiai*, *timēma*, and *euthunai* in this passage seem to be drawn from the technical language of Athenian government. Generals and treasurers drawn from Athenian upper classes: Ober, *Mass*, 8.9; 80n.63; 116–18.

⁶¹ On the audience of the *Politics*, see Lord, *Education and Culture*, 33.

the greater collective wealth of the many (repeated at 1283a40–41) is directed.⁶² And there can be little doubt that Aristotle found the arguments that might be made for democracy superior to those for oligarchy.⁶³ But, as we have already seen, he regarded the debate over distributive justice between oligarchs and democrats as fundamentally flawed in its elision of the true ends of the polis and the claims of virtue.

The claim that “the *plēthos* is collectively richer than the few” carries weight only in a debate in which the ground in dispute is defined by access to and possession of wealth, and in which control of wealth is regarded as a desirable end rather than an instrumental means to support higher ends. Democrats did have a better claim to rule the polis than did oligarchs—but democracy remained substantively unjust in that it favored the interests of a part (the poor majority) rather than promoting the virtue of the whole. The relative superiority and absolute failure of democratic justice are underlined in Aristotle’s treatment of the democratic institution of ostracism, a practice that involves “a certain political justice” (*ti dikaion politikon*, 1284b16) but that was certainly not “simply just” (*haplōs dikaion*, 1284b24–25). Aristotle describes the distinction between contingent and simple justice with the metaphor of the second sea voyage: “Now it is better if the legislator constitutes the regime from the beginning in such a way that it does not need this sort of healing [i.e., ostracism]; but the second sea voyage (*deuteros . . . plous*), if the contingency should arise, is to try to correct [it] with some corrective of this sort” (1284b17–20).

C.3. Democracy/Aristocracy versus Monarchy (Politics 3.15)

From Aristotle’s perspective, the most influential treatment of the “first, best voyage” was that of Plato. The *Politics* was obviously written in the shadow of Plato’s political dialogues, especially the *Republic*. In the end, Aristotle firmly rejects Plato’s Kallipolis as both incorrectly formulated and utterly impracticable.⁶⁴ Aristotle’s suggestion that democracy might be even a “second best” was obviously a significant break with Plato of the *Republic*, who had depicted democracy as more depraved than oligarchy and superior only to outright tyranny.⁶⁵ The claim that collective wisdom in decision-making might be superior

⁶² Aristotle imagines a situation similar to a stockholders’ meeting of a modern business corporation, in which voting is by shares of stock. Aristotle points out that the many “poor” men who composed the demos would actually control more shares than the wealthy few who had access to the great offices. It is interesting to contrast the situation in the contemporary United States. According to a report of the Federal Reserve Bank, by the early 1990s, the wealthiest 10% of the population (perhaps the approximate percentage of the free male polis population that Aristotle would regard as “leisured,” i.e., *plousioi*) owned some 68% of the wealth: P. Conkin in *American Historical Association Perspectives* 31.4 (April 1993): 10.

⁶³ Cf. Mulgan, “Aristotle’s Analysis,” 322.

⁶⁴ See esp. 1261a15–24, with discussion of Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 171–72; and studies cited above, 6.n.46.

⁶⁵ Cf. Plato’s later dialogue, the *Statesman* 302e–303a, in which democracy becomes the best of the corrupted regimes; cited by Aristotle at 1289b2–6.

to that of any one individual may be in part a response to Plato's philosopher-king, but Plato was only one of a number of fourth-century political writers who had advocated the relative merits of monarchy.⁶⁶ Moreover, Aristotle had to find some place in his analytic framework for the Macedonian monarchy, a form of government he knew well from experience, and one that had great implications for any practical constitution-builder in the late fourth century B.C. Thus, it is not surprising that in the last extended discussion of book 3, Aristotle directly confronts the claim of the rule of the one best man to be the best form of government.⁶⁷

After discussing various types of one-man rule and the relationship of the single ruler to the law, Aristotle develops a comparison between monarchy and democracy. In regard to those matters that law cannot adequately determine, "should the one best person rule, or [should] all [citizens rule]?" (1286a24–25). The now-familiar summation argument is once again deployed in favor of the rule of the many: Collective judgments are likely to be superior, "just as a feast to which many contribute is finer than a single and simple one, and on this account a mob (*ochlos*) judges many matters better than any single person" (1286a24–31). And a new argument is now added: a *plēthos* (like a great mass of water) is less corruptible; it is also less quick to anger, and less likely to passion-driven error than the few or the one (31–35). Yet Aristotle's advocacy of the relative merits of democracy over kingship (and, incidentally, over oligarchy: the many are less corruptible than either the few *or* the one) is moderated by now-familiar caveats: the *plēthos* in question "must be of free persons (*eleutheroi*) acting in no way against the law," and this is "certainly not easy (*rhaidion*) for *hoi polloi*" (1286a36–38).

At just this point in the discussion and in the middle of a sentence, Aristotle makes a quick and decisive switch: What if the group being compared to the monarch were not just any majority, but rather a majority (*pleious*) of those who were at once good men and good citizens (1286a38–39)?⁶⁸ In this case, the multitude of good men/citizens would clearly be less corruptible than the one ruler. Aristotle sweeps away the counterargument that any crowd is more liable to *stasis* than an individual with the postulate that the majority in question

⁶⁶ Notably Xenophon and Isocrates; see Newman, *Politics of Aristotle*, 1: 269–75.

⁶⁷ At 1289a30–33 (with Newman, *Politics of Aristotle*, 1: 269–75, 4: 144–45), Aristotle specifically states that aristocracy and kingship are the two candidates for the "best regime" —for to study the best regime is to speak about these terms [kingship and aristocracy] as well." Kingship is described by Aristotle as the "first and most godlike" form of ruling (1289a40; cf. 1288a28–29). Yet (1289a41–b1) Aristotle immediately casts doubt on kingship as the best form of government in that too much depends on one man's excellence. See further Aubenque, "Aristote et la démocratie," 257–60; Vander Waerdt, "Kingship"; Newell, "Superlative Virtue"; Carlier, "Notion de *basileia*." Miller (*Nature*, 191–93) specifically rejects the claim that the favorable description of kingship was "intended to be the ideology" for the rule of Philip's family, as does Brunt ("Plato's Academy," 334–36); both are arguing specifically against the extreme claims of Kelsen ("Aristotle"). But see below, 6.E.

⁶⁸ *agathoi kai andres kai politai*: cf. 3.4.1276b16ff. for the ordinary distinction between the "good citizen" and the "good person."

could be just as worthy in soul as the one. And so: “If, then, the rule of a number of persons who are all good men is to be regarded as aristocracy, and the rule of a single person as kingship, aristocracy would be more choiceworthy (*hairetōteron*) for poleis than kingship . . . provided it is possible to find a number of persons who are similar (*homoioi*)” (1286b1 –7). This description of “finding similars” may remind the reader of a colonial project: the key issue for any Greek colonial enterprise was the selection of the right persons as original colonists.⁶⁹

From the point of view of understanding Aristotle as a critic of democracy, the switch in the argument from comparing monarchy with democracy to comparing monarchy with aristocracy is a revealing move in that it points out the structural *similarities* between democracy and aristocracy. The turnabout allows Aristotle’s prior discussion of the merits of democracy as collective excellence to be deployed as the key element in an unimpeachable case for the superiority of aristocracy to kingship *as a polis government*. Aristocracy, it turns out, will enjoy the merits of democracy—especially relative incorruptibility, but also, at least by implication, the ability to aggregate the wisdom and virtue of a number of persons into a superior whole. It will have none of democracy’s disabling drawbacks—the putative tendency to slavishness, lawlessness, and problematic (from the point of view of office-holding) lack of individual virtuousness. Aristocracy, which (as the rule of the few and good) was the correct counterpart to deviant oligarchy (the few and rich) in the arithmetical taxonomy of political orders (above, 6.B.2 with figure 2), is now seen to be the counterpart of democracy in terms of the very important capacity to aggregate virtue.

Aristotle immediately underlines the significance of his juxtaposition of aristocracy to democracy and kingship by turning to a rapid and hypothetical evolutionary history of political organization in poleis. Originally, in primitive times, when poleis were small and outstanding men hard to find, kingship was the norm. When many persons similar in virtue arose, they established a polity. But when these men embezzled public funds and thereby elevated material wealth to something honorable, oligarchies arose. After this, there was a change to tyranny and then to democracy, “for by bringing things into fewer hands through a base longing for profit, they made the [collectively wealthier] *plēthos* stronger, and so it attacked them [oligarchs and tyrants] and democracies arose” (1286b8–20). This evolutionary history is the context for Aristotle’s telling comment that it may be difficult for any regime other than democracy to arise now that poleis are large (1286b20–22). The capsule history thus begins in the distant past, at the very origins of the polis, with a primitive form of kingship. It ends in the present with the apparent victory of democracy.

Five of the six regimes discussed in Aristotle’s political taxonomy are explicitly named in this synopsis: kingship, polity, oligarchy, tyranny, and democracy. In light of its recent elevation over kingship in the best-regime stakes, aristoc-

⁶⁹ On the processes and ideology of Greek colonization, see Graham, *Colony and Mother City*; Malkin, *Religion and Colonization*; Dougherty, *Poetics of Colonization*.

racy is a highly notable absence from the evolutionary scheme. One need not be a super-subtle reader of this section of book 3 to ask of the text, “What is the historical place of aristocracy in the political evolution of the polis?” The answer is, apparently, that aristocracy (in the sense in which Aristotle was using the term in his analysis of kingship) does not (yet) exist. But then his evolutionary scheme extends only to the present; the future remains open. Although it is “not easy” (*oude rhaidion*) for any regime other than democracy to arise, it is, by the same token, not impossible. And (per 1286a36–38, above), although it is “not easy” (*mē rhaidion*) for *hoi polloi* to be truly free and to obey the laws, an aristocracy is by definition composed of free men, and its virtuous members would certainly be law-abiding. Did Aristotle envision aristocracy, democracy’s counterpart when juxtaposed to kingship, as a possible successor to the democracies that seemed dominant at the time the *Politics* was written? The answer must be a qualified “yes.” Qualified first because there were some people who did not live in poleis (read: most non-Greek Europeans, including non-hellenized Macedonians) for whom kingship was certainly the best form of government, and others (read: most Asians) who were naturally suited to having masters (1287b37–39; with 6.E, below); further qualified because existing Greek polis regimes (mostly democracies and oligarchies) are not to be replaced by aristocracies. The aristocratic polis, which will be available only to a few selected persons of exceptional virtue, is, I suppose, to be established as a new foundation in the course of the expected Greco-Macedonian colonization of western Asia.

In the latter part of the fourth century B.C., the two major political options confronting a former student of Plato who had spent most of his life in Athens were the best polis of the *Republic* and Athenian democracy. Plato had developed what may be read as a compromise political solution in his huge and very late dialogue, the *Laws*: “Magnesia,” a new polis hypothetically to be founded in Crete.⁷⁰ Plato had developed a constitution for Magnesia, based on an extraordinarily detailed law code that was meant to be impervious to subsequent change. I propose that Aristotle attempted, in books 7 and 8 of the *Politics*, to offer his own tertium quid, a “middle” political option that would be somewhat different from Plato’s Magnesia. Aristotle’s aristocratic polis, like Plato’s Magnesia, lay between the excessively theoretical Kallipolis and an overly quotidian Athens. Yet Aristotle’s sketch of a polis was meant to be at once more practical and less elaborate than Plato’s.

Aristotle’s “polis of our prayers” would be substantively better (more just and more stable) than democracy. It was to incorporate some of the observed strengths of democracy in the Athenian mode, but it would also avoid what Aristotle saw as democracy’s weaknesses and contradictions. It would, therefore, be regarded as more choiceworthy than democracy to reasonable men, and

⁷⁰ Recent work on Plato *Laws*: Nightingale, “Writing/Reading”; Yunis, *Taming*, 211–36; Bobonich, “Persuasion” and “Reading the *Laws*”; Laks, “Legislation and Demiurgy”; Brunt, “Model City of Plato’s *Laws*” (summing up and criticizing earlier work).

it would be more in accord with the demands of nature. Moreover, it need not remain a product of mere speculative philosophical *logos*; it could quite possibly be realized in the real world of the probable future, as an *ergon*.⁷¹ This aristocratic polis would provide an environment where Aristotle's sort of human could realize his full natural potential as a political animal. And it would therefore provide Aristotle's reasoned response not only to Plato and other members of the critical community, but also to the democratic *politeia* under which he spent most of his adult life. Before turning to book 7, we will need to consider Aristotle's detailed critical assessment of existing modes of democracy.

D. POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY AND ITS LIMITS

According to Aristotle, the key weakness of extreme democracy—along with the absence of authoritative laws and the overactive participation in ruling (especially in offices) of people lacking in individual virtue—was its tendency to promote the unjust political domination of one part of the citizenry (i.e., the working poor) over the whole. We have already considered the significance for Aristotle's take on democracy of his two other primary ways of subdividing the whole that was the polis, that is, into family groups (*oikoi*) and into individual citizens (*politai*). It remains to consider the polis as an entity composed of sociologically defined parts: "For poleis are composed not of one but of many parts, as we have often asserted" (1290b38–39). How to reconcile the interests of the various social subgroups that coinhabited the polis, and how to decide which of the parts should have a share in a given *politeia*, were central problems for Aristotle's analysis of existing regimes: "The reason for there being a number of regimes is that there are a number of parts in any city" (1289b27–

⁷¹ This hypothesis challenges the prevailing view among contemporary philosophers, who tend to assume that the best possible polis of book 7 is a utopian philosophical construct: Rowe, "Aims and Methods"; Bodeüs, "Law and the Regime," 237–38; Cooper, "Rights and Justice"; Yacobi, "Problems," 3; Miller, *Nature*, 252: "The 'constitution of our prayers,' though possible in principle, was unattainable in practice on Aristotle's view. For, owing to nature and fortune, the polises of his day possessed neither the population nor the resources required to secure the best way of life for each and every citizen." But this ignores the possibility that the best polis might be a new foundation, its citizens carefully chosen by a wise "founder" and its resources provided by a benevolent monarch. The text evidence for the potential reality of Aristotle's best regime is ambiguous. The key sentence is 1288b37–38 (see above, 6.B.2): "For one should study (*theôrein*) not only the best [regime], but also the possible one." This might be taken to mean that the "best" and the "possible" were mutually exclusive categories. But this is an unnecessary reading. Cf. 1288b24–25: "Perhaps it is impossible that *polloi* will experience the best regime"; by implication, "a few" may have that experience. And again, 1325b35–39: the best regime will not come about (*genesthai*) in the absence of suitable equipment; by implication, if such equipment is found, the regime could exist. Book 7 seems to me best read as a description of the necessary "equipment" and how it might be "prepared in advance" (1325b39–1326a5). Keyt ("Aristotle's Theory," 277) argues on philosophical grounds that "Aristotle's justification for true aristocracy is not purely hypothetical." Likewise, Stalley ("Aristotle's Criticism") points out that Aristotle draws on the actual experience of poleis in designing his best polis, and "in following this plan one of his major concerns is that the institutions proposed should actually work."

28). Parts might arise by grouping the citizens according to wealth, birthright, virtue, or various other factors (1289b40–1290a2), and “of these parts all share in the regime in some cases [i.e., in democracies], and in other cases more or fewer [of the parts have a share]” (1290a3 –5). And since these parts differ from one another, “There are necessarily, therefore, as many regimes as there are arrangements based on the [various] sorts of preeminence and differences [pertaining] among the parts” (1290a11 –13).

Sociological differentiation played a major role in the deviation of the corrupt regimes from their correct counterparts and in the subdivision of each deviant regime into its better and worse versions. In each major corrupt variant, a specific, sociologically defined part dominated the political sphere.⁷² The monopoly of power led the members of the dominant part to rule unjustly, that is, to use their authority to further their own self-interest rather than the common interest of the polis as a whole. This endemic problem had its roots in social diversity, and hence it was imperative for the student of deviant regimes to identify the various sociological parts. The isolation and analysis of the “atoms” of the family and the individual citizen had permitted Aristotle to grasp the dual nature of the polis as a productive corporation that existed for the end of autarky and as a *koinōnia* organized in respect to citizenship for the end of living well. And so, too, it was necessary for him to attempt to isolate and analyze social groups. Yet in comparison with families and individuals, which were relatively clear and homogeneous analytic categories, sociological parts were slippery and diverse.

Given the multiplicity of social parts and governmental roles, any particular polis could be sociologically and politically subdivided in several ways. According to one arrangement proposed by Aristotle, the parts were:

1. The *plēthos* concerned with sustenance (*trophē*), that is, the farmers;
2. The “banausic” part: those who were concerned with the *technai*, without which the polis could not exist at all (although only some of the *technai* were necessary for basic existence; others were aimed at luxury and so were dispensable);
3. The marketing (*agoraion*) element—both large-scale merchants and petty retailers;
4. The laboring (*thētikon*) element;
5. The warriors who are necessary in order to foil attempts to enslave the polis’ population;
6. [Missing in the text: probably the priestly element];⁷³
7. Those who perform liturgies from their private property, namely, the wealthy (*euporoi*);

⁷² 1296b26–30: each variant form of democracy depends on the prominence of a different social group: farmers in the first and best sort, but *banausoi* and wage-laborers (*mistharnountes*) in the final and worst sort. Cf. below, 6.D.2.

⁷³ The missing element is probably priests: Lord, *Aristotle: The Politics*, 257 n. 20. An actual lacuna seems preferable to Newman (*Politics of Aristotle*, 4: 168–69), who suggests an iterated judicial/political element; compare Schütrumpf, *Aristoteles: Politik*, 3: 273.

8. A group concerned with public service (*dēmiourgikon*) and with performing liturgies by serving in the *archai*, since without magistrates (*archontes*) the polis could not exist;
9. The deliberative/judicial element. (1290b39–1291a40)

D.1. Economic Class as an Analytic Category

Given the complexity of this nine-part scheme (which Aristotle contrasts specifically to Plato's simplistic "four-part" polis of the *Republic*), there would be considerable overlap among the membership of various parts. Aristotle recognizes this, noting that "many people," for example, suppose that the warriors, farmers, *banauoi*, those who deliberate, and those who judge could all be the same persons. Moreover, the members of each of these groups laid claim to (political) virtue and supposed themselves capable of ruling in most offices (1291b2–6). Most previous political theorists, for example, Ps.-Xenophon, had focused on the polis as an entity divided into only two mutually exclusive parts: rich and poor.

But it is impossible for the same persons to be poor and wealthy. Hence these [categories] are particularly held to be parts of the polis: the well-off and the poor. Further, on account of the fact that the former are for the most part few and the latter many, these parts appear [the most] opposed of the parts of the polis. Accordingly, regimes are instituted on the basis of the sorts of preeminence associated with these, and they suppose that there are two sorts of regime, democracy and oligarchy. (1291b7–13; cf. 1290a13–29)

Many ordinary Athenians subscribed to this sort of analysis, and, as we have seen (above, 6.C.1), Aristotle himself had previously defined democracy simply as the rule of the poor, oligarchy as the rule of the wealthy. Yet Aristotle was not satisfied with explaining political behavior exclusively in terms of class interests.

A major burden of Aristotle's *Politics* is to demonstrate that the earlier political writers had failed properly to understand the political role played by economic classes and had erred in attempting to explain democracy in terms of class interests alone. Aristotle emphatically rejected the arguments of the fifth-century political theorist Phaleas of Chalcedon, who had posited that all civil conflicts arose in the course of disputes over property and who advocated property equalization as an adequate means of avoiding future factional conflicts. Aristotle attacked Phaleas by asserting that equalization was impracticable, since the just desire for inequality (i.e., superior holdings and political standing) by refined people (*hoi charientes*) would result in continued conflict (1266a31–1267b21).⁷⁴ While recognizing that some historical examples of *stasis* and revolutionary change in the poleis can indeed be shown to have had a class basis,

⁷⁴ On the shadowy Phaleas of Chalcedon, known only from this passage, see Schütrumpf, *Aristoteles: Politik*, 2: 238–41; Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*, 135–40.

the *Politics* also presents examples of revolutions that arose from other causes (e.g., 1302a16–1304b18).⁷⁵

Aristotle certainly regarded the conflict between economic classes as a dangerous source of instability, but he ultimately regarded it as secondary to the conflict between virtue and vice:

For just as in war the crossing of ditches, even if they are very small, splits apart the ranks [of the infantrymen], so every difference, it appears, makes for a factional split (*diastasis*). The greatest split is perhaps (*isōs*) that between virtue (*aretē*) and depravity; then there is that between wealth and poverty, and so on, with others in varying degrees. (1303b12–16)

Here the moral category of virtue is elevated (at least tentatively, depending on the weight one attaches to the word *isōs*) above that of class, and so, by implication, a narrowly materialistic analysis, of the sort that one might expect from democrats and oligarchs (and variations of which had been popular within the critical community for a century), will not explain the origins or development of all conflicts within all possible regimes. Simple forms of class analysis will be of very limited utility when applied to a regime in which material possessions were relegated to their properly tertiary place in the Aristotelian hierarchy of social and moral values.

In the end, Aristotle did not find a class-based analysis fully adequate, in and of itself, to describe the political sociology of even oligarchic and democratic regimes. In book 3 Aristotle had claimed that the general regime types of oligarchy and democracy were founded on the principle of class difference rather than on the principle of majority or minority rule; now in book 4, he asserts that it is improper to speak (as some do) of a democracy pertaining wherever the *plēthos* happens to be in authority, and of oligarchy wherever the few are in control of the regime. “It must rather be said that democracy (*ho dēmos*) exists when [all] free persons are those in authority, and oligarchy when it is the wealthy [alone]. But it turns out that the former are many and the latter few, for many are free but few wealthy” (1290a40 –b3). Or, alternatively: *Dēmokratia* exists when the free and poor, being a majority, have authority to rule; oligarchy when the wealthy and better born have authority and are few” (1290b17 –20).

There is a something of a slide here (quite familiar from the work of earlier critics) in the definition of democracy, from the rule of “the free” (which, of course, includes both rich and poor), to the rule of “the free and poor, being a majority.” Yet both definitions are in some sense correct: In Athenian-style democracy, all free (native) males ruled collectively as “the capital-*D* Demos” in that all had the right to engage in deliberation and voting and to hold (most) offices, but the demos was numerically dominated by those who were not leisure-class. Because decisions were made by majority vote, the “poor” held

⁷⁵ See further Ober, “Aristotle’s Political Sociology,” 122 –29. Contrast Hansen, “Aristotle’s Alternative,” 93 –94.

sway in the Assembly and courts, at least for as long as they defined their interests in class terms. Aristotle asserts that freedom is regarded as being especially characteristic of democracies (1291b34–35); indeed, freedom is the defining attribute (*horos*) of democracy, just as virtue is the defining attribute of aristocracy and wealth of oligarchy (1294a9–11). Yet how could a democracy be the true repository of freedom when it was dominated by “poor” working men who were in some sense “enslaved” (in a moral if not in a political sense) by their labor and who possessed virtue only to the extent that they were enslaved?⁷⁶ Once again, the analysis of human sociopolitical behavior predicated on linking interests directly to class standing threatens to break down when confronted by Aristotle’s preestablished moral distinctions.

D.2. Types of Democracy

The inadequacy of class as a self-sufficient category of political analysis becomes clearer yet as Aristotle moves beyond oligarchy and democracy as general regime types to focus on the distinctions between the four main subspecies of both democracy and oligarchy.⁷⁷ This more fine-grained analysis undermines the simple rich/poor dichotomy by admixing status and moral considerations; these turn out to be essential to the definition of the various political subspecies. Aristotle reminds his reader that there are several types of regime and that the reason for this has been explained (i.e., the existence of the nine parts of the polis). And so, “we may now say that there are also several kinds of democracy and oligarchy. This is evident from what has been said as well. For there are several kinds both of ‘the people’ (*ho dēmos*) and of the so-called notables (*hoi gnōrimoi*)” (1291b15–18, cf. 1317a22–35). Aristotle subdivides the *demos* into farmers, artisans, mercantile types, various seafaring types (including sailors in the fleet, overseas traders, ferrymen, and fishermen), laborers and those whose small property holdings left them without leisure, free men who were not descended from citizens on both sides, and miscellaneous marginal persons. The notables are subdivided by wealth, good birth, virtue, and education (1291b14–30).

The distinctions between the four main varieties of democracy (discussed in scattered passages in books 4 and 6) are determined by several interrelated factors: the dominant sociological group (farmers, herdsmen, *banausoi*, merchants, and *thētes*), the percentage of the citizens who choose to exercise their franchise actively by deliberating and judging, how often they exercise their franchise, the nature and degree of restrictions on access to high offices, the nature and degree of domination that the many exercise over the wealthy and/or virtuous and talented minority, the status of established law in relationship to decisions of popular assemblies, and the degree of freedom (*qua license*) that is

⁷⁶ Working men as neither simply free nor simply enslaved: above, 6.B.1. On freedom and liberty in Aristotle, see Barnes, “Aristotle and Political Liberty”; Muller, “La Logique de la liberté.”

⁷⁷ For the four types of democracy and oligarchy, see also Mulgan, “Aristotle’s Analysis,” 312–15; Hansen, “Aristotle’s Alternative,” 97–98; Miller, *Nature*, 160–64.

tolerated or encouraged. Just as Aristotle developed a hierarchy of corrupt regimes (in which democracy was the best by virtue of being the most moderate), so, too, the types of democracy are arranged hierarchically, according to their degree of deviation from the moderate ideal defined by democracy's correct counterpart, that is, the regime known as polity. The four types of democracy are characterized by Aristotle as follows:

Democracy I

- Based on equality between demos and elite; by law the poor are no more preeminent than the well-to-do. (1291b30–34)
- Farming element and that possessing moderate property have authority and govern according to laws. (1292b23–34)
- First type of democracy to arise. The *plēthos* lives by farming; ordinary citizens participate little in government; property assessments for office, to vary according to importance of office. (1318b6–1319a19)

Democracy II

- Offices filled on the basis of assessments, but these are low. (1291b39–41)
- Open to all of unquestioned descent to share in regime, but due to a lack of revenues, only the leisured actually share, and thus laws rule. (1292b34–39)
- The *plēthos* lives by herding; people live in the open and are therefore well suited for military pursuits. (1319a19–24)

Democracy III

- All citizens have a part in the offices, but law rules. (1292a1–4)
- Open to all free persons to share in the regime, but due to a lack of revenues, only the leisured actually share, and thus laws rule. (1292b38–41)
- As in Democracy IV, the *plēthos* is composed of *banausoi*, merchants, and *thētes* who live a mean (*phaulos*) life; they frequent the *agora* and town and so can easily attend the Assembly. (1319a24–30)

Democracy IV (see above, A.2)

- The *plēthos*, not law, has authority; decrees, not laws, are authoritative, which happens because popular leaders come to have greater authority than laws due to their authority over the opinion of the demos, which is persuaded by them; popular leaders destroy the offices by prosecutions of magistrates. (1292a4–34)
- Last type of democracy to arise, on account of poleis becoming larger and having revenues. All do share in regime; the *plēthos* is preeminent; all participate actively in politics. Poor receive pay and so are leisured without work; wealthy attend to own affairs and so do not attend Assembly or serve on juries. Multitude of poor has authority over regime, not laws. (1292b41–1293a10)
- Like Democracy III, characterized by a *plēthos* of *banausoi*, merchants, and *thētes* who live in town and so easily attend Assemblies. (1319a24–30)
- Unstable due to badly arranged laws and customs. Citizens include those of dubious parentage. Cleisthenes-style innovations in tribes etc. typical. Lack of proper control of slaves, women, children; everyone lives as he pleases, in a pleasant, disorderly way. (1319b1–32)

- Large citizen population that cannot easily attend Assembly without pay. (1320a17–18)

We have already considered Democracy IV (above, A.2), and Democracy II and III remain relatively ill-defined and analytically insignificant. But Democracy I, which Aristotle claims was the oldest form of democracy and which verged on the moderate ideal of “polity,” will repay closer scrutiny. This oldest and best form of democracy was characterized sociologically by the predominance of farmers and those who possessed moderate amounts of property. Aristotle’s yeoman-farmers have enough to live on if they work steadily, but they have relatively little leisure. As a result, they have only a minimal amount of time available for attending Assemblies or engaging in other political pursuits. Thus, in this first, least-bad version of democracy, the primarily agricultural demos is content to govern itself under established laws and only foregathers in Assembly when absolutely necessary. Indeed, the farmer-citizens actually *prefer* their economically remunerative work on the land to actively engaging in politics. Thus, minimal property qualifications for citizenship (on which, see below) and higher qualifications for serving in political office are not regarded as onerous, since most of the citizens prefer not to participate very actively and willingly leave most aspects of political business to the minority of wealthy men who can afford the time to serve as leaders. This balance between an active political elite and the nominally authoritative, but normally quiescent demos produces a practical sort of equality between the many and the few. A well-to-do minority—or better yet, the few who are especially capable—make up the office-holders and actually manage public affairs. The people, who come occasionally to Assembly, retain formal authority; they fulfill whatever public instinct they may have (qua political animals) by choosing (through voting) among a select group of those who are rich and/or competent as officials, and by subsequently conducting audits of their elected officials. This sort of regime, in which the demos seldom comes to Assembly and has no interest in offices because the laws ensure that office-holding is not profitable, very closely approximates a “polity.” It might even allow the practical coexistence of aristocracy and democracy (1308b38–39).

Aristotle seems very favorably disposed toward this most moderate of democratic regimes:

Those who govern themselves in this way must necessarily be finely governed (*politeuesthai kalōs*). The offices will always be in the hands of the best persons, the demos being willing and not envious of the respectable (*epieikeis*), while the arrangement is satisfactory for the respectable and notable (*gnōrimoi*). These [the respectable and notable] will not be ruled by others who are their inferiors, and they will rule justly by the fact that others have authority over the audits. For [each potential ruler] to be under constraint and unable to do everything he might resolve to do is advantageous [for poleis]. The license (*exousia*) to do whatever one wishes cannot defend against the mean element (*to phaulon*) in every human being. So it necessarily results that the respectable rule without falling into error, while the

plēthos does not get less than its due—something that is most beneficial (*ōphelimōtaton*) for regimes. (1318b32–19a4)

Aristotle's high praise for Democracy I is hardly surprising; it has been anticipated in his move in book 3 from defending the claims of strong (Athenian-style) democracy to defending a weakly democratic "alloy" in which popular judgment would coexist with elite monopoly over major offices (above, C.2). As the most moderate subspecies of the most moderate of the commonly existing regimes, Democracy I represented the best that could be hoped for by many polis residents—even after the establishment of a new and better "correct" alternative that will be available only to a virtuous few.⁷⁸

Aristotle suggests a number of practical measures that might be undertaken to inaugurate this relatively choiceworthy regime. The key to Democracy I's excellence was the quality of its sociological base: "Because the demos is of a certain quality" (1319a5 –6). This quality turns out to derive from the material stake in society of each member of the demos: The main way to upgrade a lower form of democracy to Democracy I is to distribute appropriately sized agricultural holdings among the population. Toward this end, Aristotle suggests using the sort of legislation that was employed in "ancient times": forbidding the possession by any one person of more than a certain amount of land or making land inalienable. Alternatively, one might choose to forbid the practice of taking out loans on land, or to imitate the Aphytaeans (who were, supposedly, all citizen-farmers) by subdividing the assessment of estates "into parts of such a size that even the poor have enough to enable them to exceed the assessment" (1319a6 –19).

It is not entirely clear from the text just how the Aphytaean land-tenure system worked, but evidently it was some sort of lease or sharecropping system. In speaking of the subdivision of assessments, Aristotle is surely not referring to an actual redistribution of land to individual owners (which he regarded as anathema and characteristic of extreme democracies: 1281a14–16, 1318a24–26). Rather, it seems to be that those Aphytaeans who farmed a given tract (presumably on some sort of lease arrangement) were regarded as quasi-owners for the purposes of fulfilling their property-assessment quota, and that this minimum assessment was the necessary prerequisite for citizenship in Aphytis. The significant point for our purposes is, however, that there quite clearly was some sort of property qualification for citizenship in Aphytis, and thus Aristotle seems to allow the possibility that a regime with a property qualification could

⁷⁸ See 4.11.1295a25ff., a discussion of the "second-best" regime (the one that is inferior to the "polis of our prayers," but more attainable to most people). This regime, based on the dominance of "middling" persons (*hoi mesoi*), seems less an actual regime type (1296a36–38; above, 6.n.43) than a model by which oligarchies and democracies (i.e., "most poleis," 1296a23 –27) may be judged and (it is hoped) made more moderate. It represents a sort of zero point between the most moderate forms of oligarchy and democracy: 1296b2–9. While Democracy I is presumably preferable overall to Oligarchy I (on the general grounds of democracy's relative superiority, above 6.C.1), Aristotle is careful to specify that different regime types (i.e., moderate oligarchy or democracy) may be best suited to specific poleis, 1296b9–12. Cf. Miller, *Nature*, 252–75; Hansen, "Aristotle's Alternative."

qualify as a sort of democracy.⁷⁹ In a confusing passage (partially textually corrupt, indicated here by †) in his earlier discussion (in book 4) of Democracy I, Aristotle states that the farmer-citizens will hold assemblies only as necessary.

As for the others, it is open to them to share as soon as they are in possession of the assessment defined by the laws; hence it is open to all who possess [the requisite amount of land] to share [in the regime]. In general, it is oligarchic when it [sharing in the regime] is not open to all, †but that it should be open to them to be at leisure is impossible unless there are [state] revenues†.⁸⁰ (1292b29–33)

While it is probably not possible to figure out exactly what Aristotle had in mind when he wrote the original of this partly corrupt passage, it is quite clear that he envisioned a property qualification for citizenship in Democracy I and that he acknowledged that such qualifications were, in general, oligarchic in that some free, male potential citizens were excluded—it was not open to them to share in political prerogatives. How he would have resolved the problem of this apparently oligarchic trait in what is nominally a democracy is obscured by the corruption of the text. It seems that the exclusion of the propertyless was justified by their complete lack of leisure (as opposed to the very limited leisure enjoyed by the farmers). Leisure for the propertyless might be provided by state revenues (*prosodoi*), but we are to suppose that in a farming community there would be no revenues of the sort that Athens accrued through (inter alia) a tax on imports and exports.⁸¹

But none of this really resolves the conundrum. If (as Aristotle has previously stated) democracy is the rule of (all) free men or that of the free poor, how can it be that in a democracy of any stripe, some free men would be excluded until they were able to gain control of a legally mandated minimum amount of property? One might choose to defend Aristotle's argument by introducing a distinction between the "working poor" (*penētes*, *aporoï*) and the "desstitute paupers" (*ptōchoi*) and emphasize as "democratic" the ease of access to

⁷⁹ On property qualifications in the Aphytaean constitution, see Newman, *Politics of Aristotle*, 1: 375, 4: 516–17. Aphytis was a small town located, like Stagira, on the Chalcidian peninsula: Schütrumpf, *Aristoteles: Politik*, 3: 635. It was a member of the Delian League and the headquarters of an Athenian general in the late 430s (Thuc. 1.63.2, with Hornblower, *Commentary*, 1: 106–7). Two inscriptions dated to the early 420s (*IG* I³ 62, 63) concern Athenian regulation of Aphytaean affairs, including the Aphytaean right to import grain through the Hellespont; grain-importing by Aphytaeans is especially notable in light of Aristotle's emphasis on Aphytis as a farmer-democracy.

⁸⁰ *to de dē exeinai scholazein adunaton mē prosodōn ousōn.*

⁸¹ Demont ("Le Loisir") argues that, for Aristotle, state revenues provided a spurious sort of leisure that should be contrasted to the true leisure provided by individual enterprise. Hansen ("Aristotle's Alternative," 97) argues that only Democracy IV and Oligarchy IV are "pure regimes," and that Democracy I–III and Oligarchy I–III "are mixtures combining oligarchic and democratic elements." This may be right in a sense (although the passages he cites –4309b31–35, 1293a30–34, 1317a29–38 do not prove the point), but for Aristotle's analytic contrast of oligarchy with democracy to have any meaning, there must remain some key distinction; that distinction is presumably the existence or absence of a property qualification for citizenship.

citizenship: anyone can be a citizen as soon as he can come up with the minimum assessment by whatever (legal) means. But however the circle is squared, there remains a real problem in describing as a democracy a regime in which some free adult native males were excluded because they were too poor. Aristotle's own unease is quite clearly signaled by his acknowledgment that it is, in general, oligarchic when the public realm is not open to all potential citizens.

It is, moreover, not altogether clear how citizenship in Democracy I differs from that in Oligarchy I. In the most moderate form of oligarchy, greater offices will be open only to people with high property assessments, but "it should be open to anyone possessing the assessment to share in the regime—bringing in through the assessment [system] a sufficient *plēthos* of the *dēmos* so as to allow them [the ruling class of possessors] to be superior (*kreittones*) to those not sharing" (1320b25–28). If Aristotle means by "being superior" being *numerically* superior, citizenship in Oligarchy I and in Democracy I seem essentially identical: in both regimes, a majority of free males will be citizens, access to citizenship is open to anyone who gains access to the requisite amount of property, and important offices are controlled by a narrow elite.

On the other hand, he may mean by "being superior" that the citizens in Oligarchy I would remain numerically inferior to the noncitizens, but still be stronger (e.g., militarily). This might seem to be implied by 1292a39–41: "Of the kinds of oligarchy, one is where the offices are filled on the basis of assessments of such a size that the poor do not share, though they are a majority (*pleious*), while it is open to anyone possessing [adequate property] to share in the regime." On this reading, the distinction between Democracy I and Oligarchy I would not be the presence or absence of a property qualification for citizenship, but rather it would lie in the relative numbers of free persons potentially excluded by the property assessments: In Democracy I, the majority of potential citizens are included because the assessment is relatively small; in Oligarchy I, only a minority are included because the assessment is relatively large. But even if this is the correct solution, the two regimes are very close: We could posit a hypothetical oligarchic polis with 1,001 potential citizens of whom 500 were actual citizens (in that they met the property qualification) and 501 were noncitizens (in that they did not). In this example, if a single noncitizen gained enough property to meet the qualification, the regime would be transformed from oligarchy to democracy: a "velvet revolution" indeed!

In sum, Aristotle's Democracy I—with its property qualifications for citizenship, its quiescent *demos*, and its ruling elite of office-holders—is so close to moderate oligarchy as to be virtually indistinguishable from it. Although Aristotle claims that something like Democracy I once pertained among the Mantinians (1318b26–27), Democracy I as described in the *Politics* would not, I think, be recognized as democracy by many of Aristotle's contemporaries who lived under a regime that they themselves called a *dēmokratia*. It is significant that Aristotle calls Democracy I the oldest form of *dēmokratia*. Indeed, because the first "polities" arose when the franchise was extended from the cavalrymen to the hoplites, "the regimes we now call 'polities' used to be called 'de-

mocracies'” (1297b22–25). I would suggest that Aristotle has anachronistically retrojected the term *dēmokratia* onto historical (or mytho-historical) regimes of the distant (pre-Cleisthenic) Greek past—a strategy very reminiscent of Isocrates' *Areopagiticus*. Indeed, Aristotle's Democracy I sounds very much like Isocrates' “ancestral Athenian democracy.” The Isocratean echoes are especially strong in Aristotle's various schemes to restrict offices to an elite, in his discussion of the advantages of a democracy in which most citizens stay at home and rarely attend the Assembly (cf. Isoc. 7.52–53), and when Aristotle suggests that a moderate form of democracy would be supported if the wealthier citizens were to divide responsibility for the poor among themselves and thereby ensure that each poorer citizen had a proper occupation (1320b10–11).⁸²

Isocrates, a native Athenian citizen and a self-designated internal critic of his native polis who was very eager to avoid the “oligarchic tarbrush,” felt compelled to describe his ideal regime as an ancestral democracy. Aristotle's intellectual resources and critical methods were quite different from those of Isocrates. Why, then, did Aristotle follow Isocrates' lead? Given that Democracy I and Oligarchy I tended to converge, why did Aristotle designate the regime he describes under the rubric of the “oldest and best democracy” as a democracy in the first place? Why not simply designate Democracy I/Oligarchy I as the “middling” regime of “polity”? This question can be answered in various ways, but I think that at least part of the answer must be sought in reference to Aristotle's practical goals in writing the *Politics*.

Much of Book 6 is taken up by the question of how existing regimes, whether oligarchic or democratic, could be stabilized by being made more moderate and just. Aristotle the political theorist developed a capacious definition of democracy (and, *mutatis mutandis*, oligarchy), in part because doing so might make the practical political reformer's job that much easier. Defining a broad spectrum of sociopolitical arrangements as “democracy” allowed what might be regarded as revolutionary changes to be subsumed under the rubric of internal constitutional adjustments. Very significant meliorative reforms (i.e., profound “moderation”) of the “extreme” version of democracy actually pertaining in Athens (and elsewhere) could be undertaken, but the *politeia* would remain a generic “democracy.” This meant, in Walzer's terms, that what would otherwise be “rejectionist” criticism could take on the guise of “immanent” criticism. Neither Aristotle nor those who followed his programmatic advice could be accused of having overthrown an existing regime. I have suggested above one prudential reason that a writer such as Aristotle, writing in the late fourth century B.C., might be especially sensitive to such charges: subversion of existing

⁸² There are further echoes in the two “colonization” schemes. Although Isocrates imagines the colonists as lower-class Greeks (5.120–23), he clearly regards the existing population of Asia as potential serfs and the Greek colonists as a rentier class. Aristotle *EN* 1181a12–19 is a clear echo of and critical response to Isocrates *Antidosis* 15.79–83. W. L. Newman argued (in *Classical Review* 5 [1891]: 160–61) that Isocrates' writings were “well known” to Aristotle.

polis regimes was forbidden by the regulations of the League of Corinth, established by King Philip II of Macedon in 337 B.C.⁸³

E. THE BEST POSSIBLE POLIS

The possibility of ameliorating the most “deviant” aspects of extreme democracy (and oligarchy) by internal constitutional adjustments offered the hope that most Greeks might live under political and social conditions that could be regarded as tolerably just (a good “second sailing”) from an Aristotelian perspective. There remained the question of designing a polis that would promote simple justice and *eudaimonia*. I will argue that Aristotle set himself the task, at the end of the *Politics* (as we have it), of designing a “best polis” that was possible not only in conception, but also in fact. That is to say, unlike some authors of earlier utopian literature, Aristotle believed that his “best polis” –or a very reasonable facsimile thereof–could be brought into being, within his own lifetime and with readily available human and material resources.⁸⁴

The Platonic utopian tradition surely stimulated Aristotle’s interest in the question of the “best polis” and provided a partial model. Moreover, Aristotle was well aware of the long tradition of “philosophical” contributions to the constitutions of real Greek cities.⁸⁵ But until the rise of imperial Macedon, the chances for a member of the late-fifth- and fourth-century Athenian critical community to create a new polis constitution were practically nil—Plato’s failure in Syracuse demonstrated the difficulties of remaking an existing regime. By the 340s, Athenian political thinkers, including Plato (*Laws*) and Isocrates (*Letter to Philip*), were focusing on new political horizons that might be opened by (real or utopian) colonization projects. By the 330s, Macedonian arms made the conquest of a large part of western Asia a real possibility. Whether or not he had privileged access to information from within the Macedonian court, Aristotle was certainly well aware of the general trend of Macedonian foreign policy. Given Greek and Macedonian colonial history and the realities of administering new territories, he must have assumed that the conquest of parts of Asia would be followed by colonization in the form of new poleis.⁸⁶ In sum, mid-

⁸³ The clause forbidding political subversion is well documented: Tod, *GHI*, 2: 177 lines 5–15; [Dem.] 17.8, 10, 15–16. See discussion in Hammond, *Philip*, 158–62. Of course, Aristotle’s motives need not be merely prudential; he may well have felt that the principle of nonsubversion was defensible on its own terms.

⁸⁴ On the practicality of Aristotle’s political theorizing and of the the polis of book 7, see above, 6.n.71.

⁸⁵ Book 2 considers several of these: Phaleas of Chalcedon, Hippodamus of Miletus, Solon of Athens; considerable fragments remain of Aristotle’s lost work, *On the Pythagoreans*: Ross, *Fragments*, 129–43. The evidence for philosophers as lawgivers and rulers in real cities (esp. Pythagoreans and Plato in Sicily) is collected by Vatai, *Intellectuals in Politics*.

⁸⁶ The history of Greek colonization was more or less continuous from the eighth century B.C., although the pace of activity was much reduced after the seventh century. For Macedonian colonies established by Philip II in newly conquered territories, e.g., Philippi and Philippopolis, see Ham-

fourth-century intellectual currents and international politics alike pointed to the issue of colonization. If there were to be new poleis founded in Asia, why should one (or more) of them not be designed to allow the citizen-colonists and their descendants to achieve their highest ends as political animals? This would of course require that the original colonists be carefully screened for virtuousness, and that the new colony be provided with appropriate material resources and the best possible constitution.

E.I. Potential Citizens = Actual Citizens

The first six books of the *Politics* have laid a groundwork for thinking about the best possible polis. The reader knows that the polis exists for the sake of autarkic, eudaimonic life. The best polis must command sufficient material resources to make these ends possible and must have an adequate warrior population to defend its resources, but the best polis will not exist for the sake of gaining access to material goods. The reader has learned that free, adult, male Greeks are by nature both members of (and generally heads of) families and “political animals.” They are, therefore, potential citizens. She has come to understand the difficulties involved in denying actual citizenship to potential citizens, and thus she is likely to imagine the actual citizens of the best polis as coextensive with its population of potential citizens. In this sense, the best polis will be a full democracy, an assumption strengthened by Aristotle’s summation argument. Because government by a group allows the agglomeration of individual wisdom into a greater whole, and because a larger group is relatively incorruptible, the best polis will not be a monarchy or a narrow oligarchy.

But the reader has also come to recognize the serious problems associated with allowing those who are not leisured and virtuous—*banausoi*, *technitai*, merchants, and laborers, who are supposed to be incapable of manifesting individual political virtue—to exercise the prerogatives of citizenship.⁸⁷ Thus the best polis must be an aristocracy. Moreover, she is aware of the difficulty of achieving a just and stable political order given the presence of economic classes qua sociologically defined interest groups within the polis. The best polis need not be strictly egalitarian, but it must prevent the emergence of divergent class interests among the citizens. Finally, she is well aware that the natural tendency of the political animal to work toward the eudaimonic ends for the sake of which the polis exists is all too easily misdirected into selfishly acquisitive ends. Thus the best polis will need a good law code and will need to take care that the citizens are properly educated and are not exposed to potentially corrupting influences.

The conclusion seems quite obvious: In the best polis, all citizens should be leisured and properly educated, so as to have the best chance to develop and maintain political virtue. The best *politeia* will be, in essence, a democratic

mond and Griffith, *History of Macedonia*, 2: 358–61, 660–62; Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 15–17.

⁸⁷ On “leisure” (*scholē*) in Aristotle’s political thought, and especially the close association of honorable leisure with the development of virtue, see Demont, “Le Loisir,” esp. 227–30.

aristocracy in which the citizen body would be virtuous, leisured, and coextensive with the “nonalien” free adult male population.⁸⁸ If no potential citizen is stranded outside the citizen body, a major source of *stasis* is eliminated. If all citizens are leisured and none owns greatly more than others, the polis’ population will not be divided into “rich” versus “poor” or *plēthos* versus *epieikeis*; social similarity will promote political stability. This will of course require that labor and trade be carried on by noncitizens. Metics and free foreigners (who are generally nonproblematic from the point of view of citizenship) will be quite adequate to carry out the necessary operations of trade and craftsmanship.⁸⁹ But virtually all of the thetic labor (and perhaps some part of banausic craftsmanship) will presumably fall to slaves. The “leisured demos” will have to be large enough so that citizen-warriors can ensure the security and autarky of their polis by military means. The slave population whose labor sustains the relatively large leisured-citizen class will consequently have to be correspondingly large itself. Slaves could justly be acquired according to the doctrine that had established the justice of war carried out with the purpose of enslaving populations of recalcitrant natural slaves. Although the reader might be tempted at this point to suppose that the established criteria point to classical Sparta as the best possible polis, Aristotle makes it very clear that he does not regard Sparta as a worthy model.⁹⁰

Book 7 (on the best polis) and book 8 (on the education of its citizens) of the *Politics* may strike the reader as playing out a hand that has been dealt in the course of the preceding six books.⁹¹ After a general introduction, book 7 comes to the point: What sort of hypothetical conditions (human virtuousness and material goods) are necessary to establish the best (*aristē*) polis—the “polis of our prayers”? These conditions must not be impossible (*adunaton*); the raw material (human and physical resources) must exist and must be in the best possible condition (1325b33–1326a5). Aristotle explains that the citizen body and the state territory should be moderate in size (not too big or too small),

⁸⁸ Keyt (“Aristotle’s Theory,” 263–66) argues in detail that the citizenship of the best polis is coextensive with the (nonalien) free adult male inhabitants and that all citizens are leisured, their leisure being provided by the labor of slave or serf farmers. Depew (“Politics,” 347, 362–64) and Miller (*Nature*, 240–45) make similar arguments. On the other side, Cooper, “Rights and Justice,” citing the “extremely high levels of moral and intellectual accomplishment” necessary for the exercise of citizenship in Aristotle’s best polis, points out that this correspondence between free adult males and leisured citizens is nowhere explicitly stated in the text; Cooper suggests that such a radical notion would have been made explicit. We are, of course, hindered by the incomplete nature of Aristotle’s description of the ideal state; I would, in any event, be hesitant to put too much weight on an argument from silence. The logic of the argument from nature favors Keyt’s case, and at least within Athenian critical literature, the correspondence between “free natives” and “leisured citizens” is not a new idea; it underlies Praxagora’s new regime in Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae*.

⁸⁹ Implied at 1326a20; 1331a30–b13 (commercial versus political *agora*). Compare Keyt, “Aristotle’s Theory,” 263; Depew, “Politics,” 362–64.

⁹⁰ Sparta not a model for the best polis: 1269a29ff., 1333b5ff., with Cartledge, *Agasilaos*, 116–20; White, *Sovereign Virtue*, 219–46; Saunders, *Aristotle, Politics I and II*, 149–58.

⁹¹ This conclusion implies nothing very substantive about the order of composition, at least if we suppose that Aristotle’s political thought was relatively cohesive and unitary, and if we regard the main work of analysis to be making sense of the text as a whole.

pointing out that the resident population will necessarily include “many” slaves, metics, and foreigners as well as citizens (1326a18–20). The upshot is that the polis must be “large enough so that the inhabitants (*oikountes*) are able to live at leisure (*scholazontes*) in a fashion suited to free persons and at the same time with moderation” (1326b30–32). Here *oikountes* certainly means “citizens” (or “citizens and their families”): the key point is that the citizens are *all* to enjoy leisure adequate to a genuinely free and moderate life. The polis is to have access to the sea, but the “naval mob” will not be “part” of the city. Rather, the mass of “those who are dwellers-about (*perioikoi*) and farmers of the territory” will provide rowers as necessary (1327b9–13). This is also significant in that ships’ crews made up a large and vocal part of the Athenian demos. Aristotle here makes it clear that the overlapping categories of *perioikoi*, farmers, and rowers are all excluded from citizenship. This is consistent with the requirement that all citizens be leisured.⁹²

E.2. National Character and the Role of Kingship

Aristotle now turns to the issue of the proper character of the citizen body. He does this by considering three geographic regions and the characters of their inhabitants (cf. above, 6.B.1). Northern European peoples (*ethnē*) were full of spirit (*thumos*) but lacked intelligence and *technē*; as a result they remained free, but were apolitical (*apoliteuta*) and so incapable of ruling their neighbors. The (non-Greek) *ethnē* of Asia were intelligent and artful, but without *thumos*; thus they “remained ruled over and enslaved” (*archomena kai douleuonta*). The nation (*genos*) of the Greeks, however, being in the middle, possessed both *thumos* and intelligence. It thus remained free and governed itself in the best manner. Moreover, “it is capable of ruling over all (*dunamenon archein pantōn*) if it should obtain a single *politeia*” (1327b18–32). Here Aristotle seemingly does three things: He makes it clear that the citizens of the best polis must have a “Greek” character. He points, at least elliptically, to Asia as the most likely source of natural slaves. And he suggests that rulership over the peoples of northern Europe and Asia would be possible under a unified Greek regime. But what sort of regime? In light of Aristotle’s extended discussion regarding natural limits on the size of the polis, he simply cannot mean that all Greeks could

⁹² The decision to allow the best polis access to the sea (7.6.1127a11ff., 1330a34–36) shows that Aristotle did not imagine his best polis in “inner Asia” —where Alexander’s actual Asia colonies were eventually founded (Cohen, *Hellenistic Settlements*, 18–19 with n. 9; numerous colonies in Asia Minor were, however, founded by Alexander’s imperial successors: *ibid.*, 20–23, 36–63). While keeping in mind that Alexander’s actual colonization policy probably owed nothing to Aristotle’s ideal polis, I am tempted to think of Egyptian Alexandria (founded in 333), but other sites on seacoasts and navigable rivers would suit Aristotle’s prescription as well. The key point about access to the sea is autarky and exchange: Aristotle’s best polis will engage in commerce and in cultural exchange with the wider Greek world.

⁹³ Here, Aristotle elides the existence of the Greeks who inhabited the western Anatolian littoral, who had been “ruled over” by the Persians since 404 B.C. (and previously by the Athenians, Persians, and Lydians), and who occupied many of the prime Aegean coastal city-sites.

or should live in a single super-polis. Nor, in light of the detailed discussion of the necessary diversity of polis regimes, can he mean that every Greek polis could or should have the same sort of *politeia*. Rather, this compressed passage seems to point to an overarching “international order” that would enable the conquest of “all” (the relevant parts of Europe and Asia) and thus the flourishing of many individual and autonomous poleis. In a mid-fourth-century context, the imagined agent of this international order is presumably the hellenized king of Macedon.⁹⁴

This supposition is certainly allowed (if not proved) by Aristotle’s discussion of absolute kingship (*pambasileia*) in book 3: *Pambasileia* is initially defined as the rule of one man over all things in a polis or among one or more non-polis peoples (*ethnē*) on the analogy of the master of a household (*kata tēn oikonomikēn*, 1285b29–33). We then get a set of arguments (above, 6.C.3) showing why kingship of this sort is ordinarily unsuitable to the polis. And yet there does exist by nature something (i.e., peoples of a certain character—just as in an *oikos* there were individuals of a certain character) apt for masterly (*despotikon*) and monarchical (*basileutikon*) as well as for political (*politikon*) rule; and this is both just and advantageous (*dikaion kai sumpheron*, 1287b36–37). Thus (by implication), while wrong for poleis, absolutism (monarchical or masterly) may be right for certain *ethnē*. Aristotle states that a mass of people (*plēthos*) with a nature suited to supporting an individual or family preeminent in political virtue is apt for kingship, and that the monarch who exceeds in virtue the aggregated virtue of the *plēthos* must be obeyed absolutely (1288a8–32). What sort of *ethnos/plēthos* can Aristotle have in mind?

In light of the discussion in book 1, the similarity of *pambasileia* to *oikos* rule leads us to seek a mass of psychological inferiors (cf. 1287b41–1288a6), that is, barbarians. The various peoples ruled directly by the Macedonian royal family fit the several criteria. Philip (and then Alexander) ruled over a variety of *ethnē*. By the early 330s, Philip ruled as monarch over many “spirited Europeans,” and he was expected to gain authority over “slavish Asians,” who, on Aristotle’s account, must presumably be ruled despotically. These several peoples, being generically “barbarians,” might well be assumed by Aristotle to possess less aggregate virtue than did one masterful Greek family, supposedly descended from Heracles (e.g., Isoc. 5.105).

The Macedonian royal family does not, however, possess virtue greater than that aggregated by even a single Greek polis. Hence the Macedonian king should rule his barbarian subjects as *pambasileus*, but should not rule as king or despot over Greek poleis. Yet there is nothing in Aristotle’s account preventing him from taking a benevolent hegemonic role in an international order encompassing poleis. Aristotle’s *pambasileus* is modeled on the head of an *oikos*,

⁹⁴ By the mid-330s, Philip had in fact conquered many of the peoples of the Balkans (I take these, along with the nonhellenized elements of the native Macedonian population, to be Aristotle’s “spirited but unintelligent and artless” Europeans) and virtually all of mainland Greece, and he was preparing an expedition into Asia. For a survey of Philip’s accomplishments, see Hammond and Griffith, *History of Macedonia*, 2: 203ff.; Borza, *Shadow of Olympus*, 198–230; Hammond, *Philip*.

who, as we learned in book 1, rules over its several members politically, monarchically, or despotically according to their several capacities (above, 6.B). An Aristotelian hegemon would not seek to interfere in the internal affairs of independent poleis within his hegemony any more than an Aristotelian head of family would act despotically toward his sons. This line of reasoning provides a context for the story (preserved in Plutarch and Strabo) that Aristotle advised Alexander to rule barbarians as a despot (*despotikōs*) but Greeks as a hegemon (*hēgemonikōs*).⁹⁵

E.3. *Slave Laborers and the Economics of eudaimonia*

After considering the characters of Europeans, Greeks, and Asians, the discussion of book 7 returns to the differences between material factors necessary to the existence of the polis and its actual parts; the issue here is how to assure that all merely necessary functions are performed uniquely by noncitizens and that all functions requiring political virtue are performed uniquely by citizens. Possessions (including many animate beings) are not parts of the polis (conceived as a state); rather, the (politico-) polis is a *koinōnia* of similar persons (*homoioi*) for the sake of the best possible sort of life (1328b35–37).⁹⁶ After discussing those elements necessary to preserve autarky, Aristotle reasserts the key point about these citizen-similars:

In the best governed polis . . . the citizens should not live a banausic or mercantile life, for this sort of way of life is ignoble and contrary to virtue. Nor should those who are going to be [citizens] be farmers; for there is a need for leisure (*scholē*) both with a view to the creation of virtue and with a view to political activities (*praxeis*, 1328b37–1329a2).

The citizens alone will serve as infantrymen, as well as carrying out their domestic political duties. Moreover, the citizen-warriors will enjoy a total monopoly over the means of production (*ktēseis*), since “the banausic element does not share in the polis, nor [does] any other category of person that is not a craftsman (*dēmiourgos*) of virtue” (1329a17–21). The farmers, who are to be “slaves or barbarian *perioikoi*,” obviously will not own productive possessions (1329a24–26). This leisured-citizen monopoly on goods extends to land. Pos-

⁹⁵ Plutarch *De Alexandri fortuna* 329b; Strabo 1.4.9 = Ross, *Fragmenta*, 63; for a possible context for this comment, see below, n. 105. Brunt (“Plato’s Academy,” 334–36) denies that *pambasileia* can refer to the Macedonian monarchy on the grounds that Philip and Alexander were “distinguished for intemperance” (336) and caused a great deal of human suffering. This seems to me a weak argument; the point is whether the virtue of the ruling family exceeds that of the *plēthos* of *ethnē* ruled and given Aristotle’s strictures on the lack of virtue in barbarians, one need not assume that Philip and Alexander would need to be practical paragons to fit the bill. My argument suggests Aristotle regarded the mass of ordinary Macedonians as barbarous and Philip’s family as Greek; there seems to me little reason to suppose that he thought otherwise—whatever the truth of the relationship between Macedonians and Greeks.

⁹⁶ Population of the politico-polis (citizens) versus geo-polis (all those belonging to “native” *oikoi*): above, 6.n.15.

sessions will not be held in common (contra Plato's guards), but will be used in common, as is the practice among friends. And thus no citizen will be in want of sustenance (1329b36–1330a2).

Aristotle feels it is necessary to return once again to the farmers—the main productive class in the polis and the category of persons whose exclusion from citizenship might appear most problematic to a late-fourth-century reader.

As for the farmers, it is especially important—if one should [speak] on the basis of what one would pray for—that they be slaves who are neither all of the same stock (*homophulōn*) nor spirited ones (*thumoeidōn*), as in that way they would be useful with a view to the work and safe as regards to not engaging in subversion; or, second, they should be barbarian *perioikoi* resembling in their nature those just mentioned In what manner slaves should be treated, and why it is better to hold out [the chance of] freedom as a reward for all slaves, we will speak of later. (1330a25–33)

Here, the desiderated lack of spiritedness among the unfree farming population is sure to remind the reader of the aforementioned unspirited Asians. The most desirable farming class is a mixed lot of unspirited slaves, just the sort of folk that Aristotle supposed would be taken over by the anticipated Macedonian conquest of parts of Asia. Presumably we have in the Asian farming class a good candidate for the natural slaves whose character was discussed in book 1.

But the last sentence in the passage just cited must give us pause: In light of the discussion in book 1, liberating a natural slave would seem to be no more just than enslaving an individual who is not a slave by nature. Regrettably, the promise to “speak later” regarding exactly what is going on in this sentence is not fulfilled in the *Politics* as we have it. The reader is therefore left to guess at Aristotle's meaning. Surely, given his disdain for deception as an instrument for maintaining social control (above, 6.B.2), Aristotle cannot be recommending that false hopes of freedom be dangled before those who could never justly be freed; he cannot be recommending that a virtuous man ever hold out the option of freedom to a person known unquestionably to be a permanent natural slave. The only satisfactory explanation seems to be that natural slavery is a corrigible condition and/or it was not a self-evident fact.⁹⁷ The just master will presumably keep an open mind about each of his servants; if one is discovered (when judged by criteria now lost) not to be (or no longer to be) a natural slave, that individual would immediately be manumitted. If this is correct, Aristotle cannot have been sure that the territorial population he imagines as providing the slave-workers of his best polis was composed uniquely of permanent natural slaves. Assuming that territory was Asia, he must keep open the chance that some Asians were not slaves by nature. This makes sense of his probable observations during his own residence in western Asia; presumably he did not regard (for example) his hosts in Assos as natural slaves. But it also renders his doc-

⁹⁷ See esp. Smith, “Aristotle's Theory,” 143–44, 148–49 (perhaps a corrigible condition); Garnsey, *Ideas*, 108–14 (not self-evident on basis of either appearance or behavior).

trine of just war against populations of natural slaves rather less tidy than the reader might like, and somewhat less promising as a philosophical justification for a general war against Asia.⁹⁸

The lack of a completely snug fit between books 1 and 7 on the issue of slavery may be attributed to a variety of factors. I think, however, that a factor generally overlooked in the scholarly literature on the *Politics*—the inherent difficulty of squaring a comprehensive moral philosophy of politics with a situationally contingent opportunity to put much (if not all) of that philosophy into practice—is at least partly to blame.⁹⁹ Aristotle's theory of natural slavery and just war against slave populations is perhaps the most problematic aspect of his work for modern "Aristotelian" ethicists, and Aristotle himself may have been less than happy with it.¹⁰⁰ But without the doctrine of natural slavery and its associated just-war doctrine, the Aristotle I have presented here—the moral philosopher who (like Thucydides' ideal reader) has learned to take careful notice of developments in the world and to judge their likely consequences—is stuck.

Aristotle's conception of justice is the good of each and every member of society (both those who were shareholders in the polis and those who belonged to it by belonging to a native *oikos*), and he supposed that the polis existed for the sake of autarky and *eudaimonia*. The theory of natural slavery is the only practical way to ensure both the common good and "autarkic" productive ca-

⁹⁸ This does not, of course, mean that Aristotle's just-war doctrine has anything to do with the actual justifications for Macedonian invasion—either those made publicly in Greece (e.g., revenge for the Persian sack of Greek sanctuaries in 480–479 B.C.) or those circulating within the Macedonian elite; cf. Billows, *Kings and Colonists*, 24–55, on Macedonian "imperial propaganda and justifications." Rather, the just-war doctrine allows the Asian campaign to appear justifiable within the circle of those who accept Aristotle's conception of political justice.

⁹⁹ Smith, "Aristotle's Theory," sums up the large philosophical literature addressing apparent contradictions in Aristotle's theory of natural slavery. Schofield ("Ideology," esp. 21–22) argues that Aristotle's main theory of slavery is rational (concerned with explaining different types of rule, not actual conditions of fourth-century human bondage) and thus nonideological; by contrast, Aristotle's racist comments on Asians and barbarians reflect "a nasty case of false consciousness." My account brings the theory into closer intellectual proximity to the racist comments and puts theory and racist comments alike into the service of practical goals. This has the interpretive advantage of getting the racist comments to do some work (albeit unsavory work), rather than leaving them as mere examples of conventional false consciousness; it is not, however, to claim that the practical goal is the *cause* of either theory or racist comments. Garnsey (*Ideas*, 124–27) argues that Aristotle's main theory of slavery in the *Politics* is ideological. He points to two distinctive features of the theory not found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: (1.) the slave is subhuman; (2.) the slave-master relationship is mutually beneficial. Garnsey suggests that these "feeble" innovations should mean that *Politics* book 7 postdates the *Nicomachean Ethics* and he attributes the innovations to a hypothetical intellectual debate. Accepting Garnsey's relative chronology, one might alternatively imagine that the new features were added once the opportunities in Asia became clear (mid-340s to early 330s?), in order to get the best-polis scheme off the ground as a "practical ideal." Note, by contrast, Plato's vagueness about the presence of slaves in Kallipolis: Vlastos, "Slavery."

¹⁰⁰ Problems for modern Aristotelians: above, 6.n.7; Aristotle himself "uneasy" with it: Smith, "Aristotle's Theory," 144, noting that in his will (Diogenes Laertius 5.14–15) Aristotle mandated that certain of his own slaves were to be freed immediately, others only later and conditionally.

capacity *without resorting to (actual or potential) citizen-laborers*. If he lacked a way to assure that all potential citizens were actual citizens and that all actual citizens were leisured, Aristotle had no way of transcending the *aporia* with which Ps.-Xenophon's text ends. Democracy, the *politeia* that is at once unnatural and all-too-natural, remains the best Greeks can hope for. That was an unhappy prospect for the philosopher and for his elite interlocutors. The Greek polis, the only form of human organization that allows for true *eudaimonia*, has no way to confront the coming Macedonian revolution—no way, to speak anachronistically, of existing happily within the Hellenistic world. And so, in order to escape democracy, Aristotle necessarily embraced racist notions already being questioned in his own era and developed a shaky theory of natural slavery that remains an embarrassment to analytical philosophers who regard him as a model of clear thinking and to political theorists attracted to his vision of political society as moral community.

E.4. The Macedonian Solution

If the cost of embracing racism and naturalizing slavery was high, the payoff was considerable: a polis “that would be excellent . . . by its citizens—those sharing in the *politeia*—being excellent; [and] in our case all the citizens [of the ‘polis of our prayers’] do share in the *politeia*” (1332a32–35).¹⁰¹ Most of the rest of book 7 and the entire (fragmentary) book 8 consider how citizen excellence is to be ensured through law and education.¹⁰² But, for our present purposes, the main point has already been established: Aristotle’s “polis of our prayers” is a practical alternative to democracy, borrowing from democracy’s acknowledged strengths while correcting for its putative failings. M. I. Finley once suggested that, due to his attachment to the polis, Aristotle was blinded to the significance of dramatic events unfolding in the wider world.¹⁰³ Finley was surely right insofar as Aristotle never imagined the extent of Alexandrian imperialism or reckoned with the vast cultural and social dislocations it would engender. But if my argument is correct, Aristotle ultimately solved the “problem of democracy”—the central intellectual problem of late-fifth- and fourth-century Greek political thought—by implicit reference to practical realities that existed not only outside of Athens, but outside the realm of the Greek polis itself. In doing so he built upon, but exceeded in interpretive scope, the utopian tradition he inherited from Plato and the panhellenistic viewpoint associated with Isocrates.

A key to Aristotle’s solution was his attention to certain potential consequences of Macedon’s eastward expansion and the imaginative projection of a

¹⁰¹ On the relationship between the good person and the good citizen, cf. above, 6.n.68. Keyt (“Aristotle’s Theory,” 260–70) argues persuasively that the idea of the polis as a natural entity and the concept of distributive justice both reach their fruition in the best polis of book 7.

¹⁰² For somewhat different accounts of education in the best polis, see Depew, “Politics”; Lord, *Education and Culture* and “Politics and Education.”

¹⁰³ Finley, “Aristotle and Economic Analysis,” 18.

colonial project into Asia. The premise of a new foundation avoids the rhetorical problem (the need to persuade an ineducable demos) that had plagued Plato's *Republic* (above, 4.D.4). The citizens, "similars" in virtue, would (I suppose) be carefully selected from among volunteers: some would be ethnic Greeks, but others might be hellenized Macedonians.¹⁰⁴ Their leisure would be assured by the labor of numerous native Asian farmers, who would be "justly" enslaved through the force of Macedonian arms. Such trade as was necessary would be undertaken by citizens of other poleis whose interests were more mercantile than political. These persons might be temporarily resident in the best polis as foreigners, or even semipermanently as metics, but they would not share in the regime, nor would they belong to the polis. Of course, books 7 and 8 constitute only a sketch of a polis—Aristotle seemingly regarded Plato's attention to legal detail in the colonial scheme of the *Laws* as useless. We cannot be sure that Aristotle ever had the chance to press his ideas for a "best polis" upon the Macedonian king. Certainly no "Aristotelian" colony was ever actually founded by the Macedonians. But it is worth noting that an ancient catalogue of Aristotle's writings refers to a (now lost) work in one book entitled *Alexander, or On Behalf of Colonists* (*huper apoikōn*); a late source describes this as a work about "how the colonies should be established" and associates it with another (lost) work, *On Kingship*, also written for Alexander.¹⁰⁵ There is, therefore, reason to suppose that the general suggestions of the *Politics* regarding the establishment of a "best possible" polis were augmented by more detailed discussions of how Aristotle supposed appropriate colonists might be chosen and settled in their new home, and how the relationship between the hegemon and the independent poleis might work in practice.

Meanwhile, Aristotle assumed, most poleis of old Greece would remain at least nominal democracies or oligarchies. But with luck and legislative diligence, these "deviant" regimes would tend to become more moderate over time, and they might eventually come to approximate the model of the "second-best," middling *politeia*.¹⁰⁶ Old and new poleis alike would exist under an international

¹⁰⁴ Yack (*Problems*, 1–3) notes that Aristotle expected that some genuinely virtuous men could in fact arise from the environment of corrupt existing regimes.

¹⁰⁵ Diogenes Laertius 5.22. Pseudo-Ammonius, *Aristotelis Categoriae commentarius* folio 9.b (= Ross, *Fragmenta*, 61–62), mentions the work on colonies and one on kingship (*peri te basileias kai hopōs dei tas apoikias poieisthai*) as having been written specifically for Alexander. Ross (*Fragmenta*, 62–63) assigns the passages from Plutarch and Strabo on ruling Greeks and barbarians (cited above) to the book on colonies (predictably rejected by Brunt, "Plato's Academy," 297 n. 44). The book on colonies is probably genuine; Diogenes does not relegate it to the list of spurious works (although, unlike the work on kingship, it does not appear in the catalogues of Hesychius or Ptolemy). At the very least (compare the *Seventh Letter* of Plato), the existence of such a book suggests that the ancient Aristotelian tradition supposed that a work by Aristotle addressed to Alexander on the subject of colonies *should* exist. And thus attributing a practical interest in colonization to Aristotle is not simply a retrojection of *modern* ideas.

¹⁰⁶ See above, 6.n.78. Kelsen ("Aristotle," 188–89) suggests that "polity" is best understood as a fusion of oligarchy and democracy, tending toward democracy. Lord (*Education and Culture*, 33) supposes that Aristotle wrote primarily to instruct aristocrats in existing poleis on how they might achieve the end of improving states that were not aristocracies.

order established by the king of Macedon, who would allow local polis autonomy but would punish attempts at political subversion.¹⁰⁷ This two-tier scheme—existing poleis supported and new, aristocratic poleis established under the umbrella of a hegemonic international order—is in tune with what Aristotle could reasonably expect to occur, with what he might be expected to favor, with his stated concerns in writing the *Politics* (especially 4.1.1288b10ff.), and—if only in the most general and least utopian sense—with what actually happened in the late fourth century.¹⁰⁸

It would be absurd to suggest that Aristotle accurately foresaw (or could have foreseen) the Hellenistic world in all its great complexity.¹⁰⁹ He surely failed to recognize the profundity of power inequalities between Hellenistic kingdoms and poleis; and the chaotic military, political, and economic conditions attending the subdivision of Alexander's empire remained beyond his ken. But an Aristotle capable of working on the *Politics* in the mid-330s B.C. without noticing the conditions I have discussed above must have been even more blind to the world than Finley supposed. He not only must have been utterly incapable of seeing the most obvious relationships between what he was writing and what was happening around him, he also must have been unaware of his chance to resolve a great problem in the long tradition of critical political thought by breaking down the immanent/rejectionist dichotomy between “democracy as capable of melioration, and the best that can be hoped for” and “democracy as

¹⁰⁷ Punishment of subversion: above, 6.n.83. In 334 Alexander declared that democracy would henceforth be universal among the Greek poleis of Asia Minor (Arrian *Anab.* 1.18.1–2; Tod, *GHI*, 2: 192 lines 3–4); presumably his motives were practical rather than “Aristotelian.” Given Aristotle's concern for maintaining military preparedness in the best polis (not only a large citizen army, but also walls and modern armaments), we cannot suppose that he imagined the Macedonian monarch would prevent all warfare. But there is no necessary reason to suppose that a complete suppression of warfare would be regarded as essential by an Aristotelian hegemon. Allowing some local disputes to be resolved by arms would help maintain traditional virtues (esp. courage) and so would conduce to the education of virtuous citizens; cf. Charles-Saget, “Guerre et nature,” 110–14.

¹⁰⁸ Kelsen (“Aristotle”) suggests an alternative “dual structure,” with monarchy as best overall, but moderate democracy best for most poleis. It is fair for my own reader to ask at this point why Aristotle did not make all of this more explicit. My answer would be that (1) the text as we have it is an incomplete rough draft, (2) Aristotle's primary intended audience (those in the Lyceum) had the benefit of texts (e.g., those on colonies and kingship reportedly written by Aristotle for Alexander) and discussions we do not have access to, and (3) he certainly never intended the *Politics* as a policy-oriented “point paper” —it was a work about the political regime of the polis, not about real or possible international regimes encompassing many poleis.

¹⁰⁹ For the realities of Macedonian colonization, see Billows (*Kings and Colonists*, 146–82), who argues (169–72) that the Macedonian colonists (mostly soldiers) actually were a leisured elite in the new cities. For political relations between Hellenistic kings and Greek cities, see Ma, “Antiochus III and the Cities of Asia Minor.” Solmsen (“Leisure and Play,” 27–28) suggested that Aristotle's conception of *scholē* in books 7–8 (neither narrowly civic nor purely contemplative) anticipates a “Hellenistic” sensibility, and that the philosopher was, therefore, “not insensitive to ‘the shape of things to come.’” See, however, Demont, “Le Loisir,” correcting Solmsen's apolitical understanding of Aristotelian *scholē*. Edith Hall (“Is There a Polis?”) makes a point similar to Solmsen's about the *Poetics*, focusing on Aristotle's identification, as an outsider in Athenian society, with an “emerging ideology” that would eventually divorce drama from its civic and political roots.

incapable of melioration, and thus a stimulus to revolutionary action or utopian epic theory.” Finally, an Aristotle blind to colonial opportunities must have been completely cold to the Thucydidean project of writing “useful” political theory that allowed the reader to make rational decisions regarding the probable future, and equally indifferent to the Socratic and Platonic (Sicilian voyage) goals of realizing philosophy in the real world. And so he could not really have cared either about his intellectual rivals or about actual human happiness. Such an “ivory-tower Aristotle” resembles many a modern scholar, but he is impossible to take seriously within the classical Greek context, and there is no longer any need to assume that he ever existed.

The “engaged Aristotle” I have presented is, in a very real sense, the inheritor and the culmination of the critical tradition traced in previous chapters. Like Ps.-Xenophon, Aristotle was deeply concerned with the political ramifications of economic class distinctions and with collective versus individual political responsibility. Like Thucydides, he paid careful attention to recent political history in order to help his reader arrive at a better understanding of the probable future. Like Aristophanes, he worried about the troubled relationship between law and practice and thought about how to sort out the gray area between human nature and political culture. Like Plato, he attempted to design a just polis that would offer a legitimate alternative to democracy as the most choice-worthy form of political organization. And like Isocrates, his knowledge of and sympathy for a wider “panhellenic” aristocratic/intellectual community provided fresh resources for political theorizing.

In common with each of the critics considered here, Aristotle concerned himself with the problems of popular wisdom and ignorance, democratic leadership, and collective judgment. But unlike most of his predecessors, he chose not to focus on the problematic role of performative language or ideological hegemony.¹¹⁰ In turning the focus of political theorizing toward issues of sovereignty and institutional structure and away from issues of leadership and ideology, Aristotle, the cosmopolitan “outsider” who wrote less for an Athenian dissident readership than for his students in the Lyceum, transcended the environment of democratic Athens, the established concerns of Athens’ critical community, and the dichotomy between immanent and rejectionist criticism. Having developed an integrated theory of politics that pointed the way both to the ameliorative practice of citizenship in existing democratic regimes *and* to actualizing utopian ideals, Aristotle could claim to have solved the theory-practice conundrum that I have been referring to as “Ps.-Xenophon’s *aporia*.” And in so doing, he helped to set political philosophy on a path that is dominant today. The “Aristotelian turn” in political thought proved extremely fruitful, but it has also tended to obscure the rhetorical and ideological underpinnings of Athenian democracy and the motivations of earlier Greek political writing critical of democracy. A major burden of the previous chapters of this book was to recuper-

¹¹⁰ The picture changes somewhat, however, if one considers the relationship between the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric*; cf. Cassin, “*Lógos et politique*.”

ate both a specifically Athenian democratic political experience and a “pre-Aristotelian” way of thinking critically about democratic politics in a specifically Athenian context. In the final chapter, we turn to a direct Aristotelian engagement with the history, practice, and critics of democracy at Athens.

The Dialectics of Dissent: Criticism as Dialogue

A. AN ARBITRATOR AMONG THE CRITICS: PS.-ARISTOTLE *POLITICAL REGIME OF THE ATHENIANS*

On this occasion [the implementation of the Amnesty of 403, after the fall of the Thirty], they [the Athenian democrats] seem to have reacted to their previous misfortunes, both privately and communally (*kai idiai kai koinēi*), in a manner more noble and public-spirited than all other people (*kallista dē kai politikōtata tōn hapantōn*). Not only did they wipe out all prosecutions for past acts (*aitias exēleipsan*), but they paid back out of common funds the money that the Thirty had borrowed from Sparta. . . . Meanwhile the demos, having become authoritative (*kurios*) in regard to public affairs, established the present *politeia*, in the archonship of Pythodorus [404/3]. The demos' takeover of the *politeia* seems to have been accomplished justly (*dikaiōs*), since it was the people themselves who accomplished their own restoration (*kathodos*). (Ps.-Aristotle *Ath. pol.* 40.3–41.1)

This measured judgment on the reestablishment of Athenian democracy in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War was written between 332 and 322 B.C. by a member of Aristotle's Lyceum—possibly by Aristotle himself, but I tend to suppose by an anonymous student. Ps.-Aristotle's text, entitled, like Ps.-Xenophon's of a century prior, *Athēnaiōn politeia*, was one of the many "polis constitutions" collected at the Lyceum, but the only one of them to survive mostly intact. Ps.-Aristotle's ideal reader may best be imagined as a fellow Aristotelian, familiar with and sympathetic to the arguments developed in the *Politics* (whether or not he had access to the actual text).¹

A.I. Correct and Final Democracy?

Some of the terminology and the general mode of analysis of the Aristotelian *Athēnaiōn politeia* are immediately recognizable to any reader of the *Politics*: teleological naturalism informs the entire work; the *politeia* achieved by the

¹ Greek text: F. G. Kenyon (OCT, 1920); M. Chambers (Teubner, 1986). Translation with introduction and notes: Rhodes, *Aristotle, "Athenian Constitution."* Commentaries: Rhodes, *Commentary*; Chambers, *Aristoteles, "Staat."* Date: Rhodes, *Commentary*, 51–58, and Aristotle, "Athenian Constitution," 11, 31–32. "Scientific *politeia*" as a genre: Keaney *Composition*, 3ff. Authorship and relationship to Aristotle's school: Keaney, *Composition*, 3–19 (by Aristotle himself); Rhodes, *Commentary*, 37–40, 58–63, and Aristotle, "Athenian Constitution," 11–13 (by a student of Aristotle). The issue of authorship is not of paramount importance to the argument developed here.

returning democrats is regarded as the culmination of a long democratic political evolution.²

This was the eleventh of the constitutional changes (*metabolai*) . . . from which [the *politeia*] has remained in force up to the present day, continually increasing the power (*exousia*) of the *plēthos*. The demos has established itself as *kurios* over all matters (*hapantōn*) and manages (*dioikeitai*) everything through *psēphismata* and *dikastēria* in which the demos is the agent of power (*esti ho kratōn*). And even the judgments of the *boulē* are referred back to the demos. And in this (*kai touto*) they seem to act correctly (*orthōs*), since the few are more easily corrupted than are *hoi polloi*, both by the prospect of gain (*kerdos*) and by considerations of reciprocal gratitude (*charis*, 41.2).

Extrapolating from the taxonomy of regimes in the *Politics* (above, 6.D.2), it appears that the final stage of Athenian democracy as described by Ps.-Aristotle is a prime example of a corrupt (*parekbasis*) “final democracy” –the fourth and worst form of democracy in which all affairs are controlled by decrees and lawcourts.

Yet Ps.-Aristotle’s “eleventh Athenian constitutional order” not only is ruled by the people through decrees and courts, it also is a regime that acts in some sense “correctly” (*orthōs*); and thus the distinction between the “correct” and the “corrupt” regime, essential to Aristotle’s analysis in the *Politics*, seems to be held in abeyance: Aristotle had suggested that the oldest and most moderate form of democracy (Democracy I) was potentially assimilable to the correct regime of “polity”; but for Ps.-Aristotle, Athenian democracy “these days” is both extreme and “correct.” Ps.-Aristotle’s reasoning in designating as “correct” the decision to restrict the independence of the council is evidently based on the important consideration Aristotle had raised in the *Politics* when comparing democracy with monarchy, that is, the relative incorruptibility of a *plēthos* (above, 6.C.3). Even if one were to limit the scope of the approbative *orthōs* to the relationship between demos and *boulē* (this will depend on the force of *touto*), the general tone of these passages is unmistakably one of respect and (perhaps rather grudging) admiration.

The chapters on the establishment of the eleventh Athenian constitution are followed by a detailed and nonjudgmental discussion of current institutional arrangements (focusing on boards of magistrates and the people’s courts, 42–

² Day and Chambers (*Aristotle’s History*), Chambers (*Aristotles*, “*Staat*”); and Keaney (“Structure,” 117) emphasize *Ath. pol.*’s Aristotelian naturalism. Terminological similarities between *Ath. pol.* and *Pol.*: Keaney, “Review of Rhodes, *Commentary*,” esp. 456 (on *gnōrimoi*). Constitution form pertaining in 403–322 as the *telos* of Athenian democracy: Rhodes, *Aristotle*, “*Athenian Constitution*,” 17–18 (citing 26.2, 41.2 in the context of Aristotle *Rh.* 1366a and *Poet.* 1449a); Keaney, “Structure,” 117, 121, 131. Keaney (*Composition*) argues that the development of democracy is presented by *Ath. pol.* as the systematic appropriation by the demos of powers originally belonging to magistrates, the Areopagus council, and the council of 500.

69).³ The contrast between this *Athēnaiōn politeia* and its Ps.-Xenophontic namesake is unmistakable. Moreover, by affirming that the demos made itself *kurios*, Ps.-Aristotle acknowledges the demos as a historical agent, capable of acting on its own initiative in asserting its own political authority. Ps.-Aristotle can, however, legitimately be included in the roster of Athenian authors critical of democracy; the overtly critical aspect of his text emerges in the historical account of Athenian constitutional development up to 403 B.C., an account that would have begun with a consideration of very early times (the introduction is missing from the text) and concludes with the passages cited above.

Ps.-Aristotle stands at the end of the long tradition of classical literary treatments of democracy written by elite intellectuals resident in democratic Athens. While generally Aristotelian in his thinking, Ps.-Aristotle is aware of a long pre-Aristotelian tradition of work on democracy. Though he seldom cites his sources, he does make mention of interpretive debates between “democrats” and those hostile to them.⁴ Like many of his predecessors, Ps.-Aristotle imagines Athenian political history as the product of an ongoing struggle between the mass of citizens and the elite (especially 2.1, *gnōrimoi* versus *to plēthos*), which he conceives (anachronistically in the case of pre-Cleisthenic developments, surveyed at 28.2) as a struggle for control of the *politeia* between partisans of democracy led by their “champions” (*prostatai*) and the somewhat less cohesive forces of the “notables.” The first champion of the demos was Solon; he was followed by Pisistratus and then by Cleisthenes (28.2). Ps.-Aristotle’s inclusion of the tyrant Pisistratus in the list of democratic champions is distinctive (see below, 7.A.2). But his assumption that Solon was a self-conscious democrat and that Cleisthenes merely furthered the democratic project is familiar from earlier fourth-century critical writers (e.g., Isoc. 15.231–32; above, 5.B.3), as is the idea that historical agency ordinarily belonged not to the people, but to their elite leaders.⁵

Like many earlier Athenian critics of popular rule, Ps.-Aristotle has a very low opinion of the more recent “leaders and champions” of the demos—he regards most Athenian *rhētores* after Aristides and Themistocles (i.e., from about 470 onward) as corrupt, self-interested panderers: After Ephialtes’ attack on the powers of the Areopagus council (25) in 462 B.C., the *politeia* became “slacker” (*apesterēthē*, 26.1), and the Athenians ceased to pay close attention to

³ Cf. Rhodes, *Commentary*, 37: “There is no comment on the merits and defects of the constitution described”; Chambers, *Aristoteles*, “*Staat*,” 328.

⁴ The only sources mentioned by name are Solon and Herodotus; on Ps.-Aristotle’s sources, see below, 7.n.11. Interpretive debate: below, 7.A.2. Keaney (*Composition*, 136–40) argues persuasively that *Ath. pol.* used (and implicitly responded to) not only Thucydides on Pericles’ successors, but also Plato’s hostile depiction of Athenian politicians in the *Gorgias*, and perhaps Isocrates (*On the Peace* and *Antidosis*) as well. This places Ps.-Aristotle solidly within the critical-intellectual tradition I have been discussing.

⁵ Ps.-Aristotle on class struggle: Day and Chambers, *Aristotle’s History*, 146–47; Rhodes, *Commentary*, 88–89. Struggle for “sovereign” control of the *politeia*: Keaney, “Structure,” esp. 121–27. Ducat (“Aristote et la réforme”) argues that *Ath. pol.* sees Cleisthenes’ reforms as responsible for the turn to radical democracy.

their laws (26.2); in the age of Pericles and with the advent of naval power, the constitution became “still more democratic,” *hoi polloi* became “bolder” and began to run things themselves, the courts became more corrupt (27). Yet the constitution was still “relatively good” (*beltiō*); it was after Pericles’ death that things became much worse and the demos first sought as their champion someone who was not “well regarded among the respectable classes” (*eudokimounta para tois epieikesin*, 28.1). Like Thucydides, Ps.-Aristotle lays a good deal of the blame on Cleon, who “especially corrupted the demos” by his wild impulses and was vulgarly exhibitionistic as an orator (28.3); he was followed as popular champion by Cleophon and Callicrates. In this respect, the post-Peloponnesian War era is no better: “Since Cleophon there has been a constant succession of demagogues who particularly desire to act outrageously and to gratify (*charizesthai*) *hoi polloi*, looking only to the present moment” (28.4).

How can we square this teleological depiction of progressive descent into an increasingly “extreme” democratic and demagogic mode of government (which has been read as a historical demonstration of the progression, sketched in the *Politics*, from the *politeia*-like Democracy I to the “final” and extreme Democracy IV; cf. above, 6.D) with the remarkably sanguine account of the events of the restoration and the nonjudgmental discussion of the current Athenian constitutional apparatus?⁶ Part of the answer would seem to be that, while Ps.-Aristotle sometimes imagines a very tight relationship between demos and demagogue (e.g., Cleon’s successful “corruption of the demos”), he is equally capable of imagining the relationship between demos and demagogue as oppositional: although (like many of his predecessors in the critical project) he regards it as axiomatic that the demos is in control (*kurios*),⁷ Ps.-Aristotle’s demos is quite different from the demos imagined by Thucydides and (especially) Plato. Rather than Plato’s “great beast” that employs rewards and punishments to corrupt the soul of the would-be political leader (along with all other members of society), Ps.-Aristotle imagines the Athenian demos as capable of identifying malfeasance by its leaders and swift to punish those who would lead the state astray: “Both of these [Cleonophon and Callicrates] were subsequently condemned to death, for as a rule (*eiōthen*), the *plēthos*, especially when it has been deceived, comes to hate those who have led them on to do anything regarded as wrong” (*mē kalōs*, 28.3). In light of the critical tradition, we might be tempted to read this last passage as a sly demonstration of demotic ingratitude toward their “champions.”⁸ And yet elsewhere, Ps.-Aristotle attributes the

⁶ It is the burden of Day and Chambers, *Aristotle’s History*, esp. 70–71, that the historical account of democratic development in *Ath. pol.* is predicated on the typology of democracy discussed in *Politics* books 4–6. Their account ends, however, with the revolutions of 411/10.

⁷ Keaney, “Structure,” emphasizes the importance of this term for *Ath. pol.*’s analysis.

⁸ See, for example, Rhodes, *Commentary*, 357 (ad loc.): “The fickleness of the Athenian assembly is a commonplace in writers who are not enthusiastic supporters of democracy” (citing Thucydides, Ps.-Xenophon, and Xenophon). It is worth noting that, according to other Athenian writers (Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.35; Lys. 13.12, 30.10–13), Cleophon’s judicial execution was rigged by oligarchic supporters of accommodation with Sparta in the lead-up to the takeover of the Thirty.

striking Athenian tolerance regarding those friends of the tyrant Hippias who had not shared his crimes to the “customary generous leniency of the demos” (*tēi eiōthuiai tou dē mou praoētēi*, 22.4); evidently the generous response of the demos after the restoration of 403 was not a fluke.⁹ Moreover, in a highly approbative passage, Ps.-Aristotle describes how Pisistratus ruled Athens according to the laws; his character is described as “*dēmotikos* and *philanthropos*” (16.8, cf. 14.1, 16.2).

By way of contrast, Ps.-Aristotle has relatively little good to say about Athenian oligarchs. The Thirty in particular are described as utterly wicked: greedy, treasonous, deceitful, and bloodthirsty (34–37). But their political ancestors were evidently little better: before Solon, the *politeia* was “oligarchic in all respects,” and especially in that “the working men, along with their wives and children, were enslaved (*edouleuon*) by the wealthy” (2.2). The reader is not given the impression that this was the exemplary bondage of Aristotelian “natural slaves” by “natural masters”; rather, it appears that the members of the Athenian demos responded, as typical Aristotelian “political animals,” with deep resentment toward the existing regime: “It was their enslavement that was taken by *hoi polloi* as the harshest and least bearable aspect of the *politeia* . . . it was as if to say that they had no share in anything” (*oudenos . . . metechontes*, 2.3). The reader of the *Politics* will not be surprised to learn that under these conditions, “the demos rose up against the *gnōrimoi*” (5.1).¹⁰ The much later oligarchic regime of 411 is treated relatively favorably, but notably, Ps.-Aristotle suggests that it was maintained through deception: the Five Thousand “were appointed only in *logos*, while the Four Hundred . . . ruled over the polis” (32.3). In sum, and as the *Politics* has led us to expect, surveying the constitutional history of Athens suggests that democracy is on the whole preferable to extreme oligarchy: more stable in practice and more generous in spirit.

A.2. *Seizing the Middle Ground*

While democracy was better than outright oligarchy, Ps.-Aristotle, in harmony with the priorities of the *Politics*, reserves his highest accolades for “middling regimes.” Under the benevolent management of the Areopagus council after the Persian Wars, the trend toward more extreme democracy was temporarily reversed, and “the Athenians were well governed (*epoliteuthēsan . . . kalōs*) at this time” (23.2). Likewise, after the overthrow of the Four Hundred, the Five Thousand took charge, and the Athenians “seem to have been well governed

⁹ The Athenian reconciliation: above, 2.n.125. This event remains remarkable, although not unique in the history of democracies. As I write this, the South African “Truth and Reconciliation” panel (headed by Bishop Desmond Tutu and President Nelson Mandela) seems to be working toward a national reconciliation that, if successful, will be even more remarkable than the Athenian, given that the history of oligarchic misrule in South Africa was much longer and even more systematically and ingeniously vicious.

¹⁰ Keane (Composition, 73–74; cf. Rhodes, Commentary, 45–46, and Aristotle, “Athenian Constitution,” 23) has demonstrated that the structure of 2.1–5.1 is a fairly elaborate and tight ring composition, beginning and ending with “strife between the masses and the notables.”

(*kalōs politeuthēnai*) at this time, when they were at war and the *politeia* was based on the hoplites” (33.2). In each case the middling regime was relatively ephemeral, and the general trend toward greater democratization recommenced after the moderate interlude (25–26.1, 34.1). But if, for Ps.-Aristotle, democracy of an advanced sort seems to be Athens’ general fate, occasional periods of meliorative retrogression toward a more “moderate” constitution played an important part in Athenian political development. If we imagine the “eleventh constitution” to be the teleological summation of Athens’ prior historical development, there may be reason for the reader to hope that even the “final” form of democracy embodies the potential for meliorative adjustments to be made from time to time. And thus Ps.-Aristotle, when writing of Athens, may perhaps keep open the possibility of enacting nonrevolutionary “moderating” measures of the sort discussed by Aristotle in the *Politics* (above, 6.D.2). The optimism about democracy’s historical capacity to undergo healthful periods of retrograde political motion is at least implicitly associated with Ps.-Aristotle’s authorial stance of moderator between rival schools of critical political interpretation.

Ps.-Aristotle’s account is remarkable in its acceptance of the “current Athenian regime” at once as a direct expression of the will of the *demos* and (at least relatively speaking) as law-abiding and respectful of the established prerogatives of all citizens. This state of affairs is not, he suggests, the general rule among Greek democracies: whereas after the reconciliation of 403, the Athenian democrats acted *more* generously than called for in their formal agreements, by paying the debts incurred by the oligarchs out of general public funds, “in other poleis, when democrats come into power, far from making voluntary payments out of their own property, they redistribute the land” (40.3). For Ps.-Aristotle, Athenian democracy of the fourth century is considerably more respectful of (what we would now call) property rights than other known and imaginable examples of popular rule. Ps.-Aristotle recognizes that his relatively favorable depiction of postrestoration Athens is liable to attack from within the critical community. He implicitly invites his reader to regard his work as establishing a political “middle ground” –as an attempt to arbitrate fairly between the partisan political views of “democratic” sources of information and opinion and those of their hostile, oligarchic counterparts.

Ps.-Aristotle bases his account of Athenian history on a variety of sources, some relatively philo-democratic (e.g., Herodotus, named at 14.4) and some more overtly critical (e.g., Thucydides and oligarchic tracts). The ambidexterity of his approach to politically tendentious historical sources has been much discussed and cannot be explained in monocausal terms, but it is certainly appropriate for an overall authorial stance of moderation and arbitration between partisan interpretations of political history.¹¹ Ps.-Aristotle’s narrative theme—

¹¹ Ps.-Aristotle’s sources: Rhodes (*Commentary*, 15–30, and *Aristotle*, “*Athenian Constitution*,” 18–23), while accepting that his knowledge of the past is often secondhand, argues for relatively wide reading on the part of the author and intelligent selection of material; he rejects the idea that Ps.-Aristotle based his account primarily on only one or two sources. Rhodes lists among the probable direct sources of *Ath. pol.* Herodotus, Thucydides, one or more *Attides* (including that of

Athens' progressive political development into an extreme democracy, a process that is interrupted at various points by "retrograde" intervals of moderation—allows him to accommodate (if occasionally at the expense of narrative coherence) a variety of seemingly incompatible political tendencies among his sources. It is in light of his self-styled role as a moderate arbitrator between hostile partisan accounts that the problematic discussion of the "Dracontian Constitution" (4.2–4) should be understood. This passage of the *Athēnaiōn politeia* describes the "hoplite republic" putatively established by the Athenian lawgiver Draco in 621 B.C. Draco's *politeia* supposedly featured enfranchisement of all those who bore heavy arms (i.e., the hoplite class), property qualifications on a sliding scale for office-holding (considerably greater assessments were required of those who held higher offices), a governing council of 401 men of hoplite status and above, and general oversight by the Areopagus council.

Scholars have long recognized that the Dracontian Constitution as described in *Athēnaiōn politeia* is a historical fiction that has no place in actual Athenian political history—the original work from which the author adopted this passage was certainly written by an inventive critic of democracy, probably someone involved in the debate over the Athenian "ancestral constitution." The Dracontian Constitution passage was, moreover, demonstrably interpolated into the text of the *Athēnaiōn politeia*, added after the main narrative was completed, either by the original author or by some other member of the Lyceum.¹² Whatever the precise history of the interpolation, the intermittently progressive model of historical development assumed in the main narrative, which allows for (indeed, welcomes) interruptions in the general flow of democratic development, invites this sort of textual augmentation. The inclusion of the Dracontian Constitution is clearly an afterthought, but (historicity aside) it is fully in keeping with the argument of the work as a whole.

The diversity of interpretations of past Athenian history is to the fore in Ps.-Aristotle's detailed discussion of the reforms of Solon. Having pointed out that Solon was appointed "reconciler and archon" by the mutual agreement of oppressed demos and ruling elite, our author asserts that Solon himself was, by birth and reputation, one of the foremost men (*prōtoi*), but by wealth and circumstances he was of the "middling sort" (*mesoi*). And, like the author of the Aristotelian *Athēnaiōn politeia* himself, Solon in his poetry "consistently (*holōs aiei*) lays the blame (*aitia*) for the *stasis* on the wealthy" (5.3). As soon as he

Androtrion), partisan pamphlets by both democrats and oligarchs, and some archival material (especially on legal procedure and institutions). This account of the composition of *Ath. pol.* seems preferable to the more mechanistic theories (cited and discussed in detail by Rhodes), which sought to explain Ps.-Aristotle's apparent pro- or antidemocratic position in any given passage by reference to his uncritical reliance on tendentious source materials. See further Day and Chambers, *Aristotle's History*, 5–24 and passim; Chambers, *Aristoteles*, "Staat," 84–91, 270, arguing for an even higher degree of independent thought.

¹² That the Dracontian Constitution is an interpolation is clear from the summary of constitutional changes at 41.2: the Dracontian Constitution is a numberless "change," inserted between change no. 2 (Theseus) and change no. 3 (Solon). Cf. Rhodes, *Commentary*, 84–87, and Aristotle, "Athenian Constitution," 11–12, 32–33.

became master of affairs, Solon “liberated the demos,” then and for the future, by instituting the debt-relief measures known as the “shaking off of burdens.” Yet somehow Solon allowed advance knowledge of the coming reform to leak out, and certain people made large profits by trading on insider information. This event was the subject of a debate among Ps.-Aristotle’s sources: “Democratic sources say” (*hoi dēmotikoi legousi*) that Solon was outmaneuvered by his friends. But “those who desire to engage in hostile slander” (*hoi boulomenoi blasphemēin*) say that he himself shared in the profits (*auton koinōnein*). Ps.-Aristotle comes down staunchly on the side of the former tendency: “The *logos* of the *dēmotikoi* is more trustworthy.” This assertion is supported by an appeal to Solon’s own character: he was consistently moderate (*metrion*) and public-minded (*koinon*) in all other respects—indeed, so much so that he rejected tyranny and accepted the hatred of both sides (mass and elite), setting a higher value on the honor and security of the polis than upon his own aggrandizement (*pleonexia*, 6.1–3).

Later, when discussing the aftermath of the assassination (in 514 B.C.) of Hipparchus, brother of the tyrant Hippias, Ps.-Aristotle makes note of another controversy. In the course of being interrogated by the tyrant’s men (apparently under torture), the assassin Aristogeiton revealed the names of either his actual or his putative co-conspirators. “The *dēmotikoi* say” that he (falsely) named those who were genuine friends of the tyrant in order that the tyranny should be made to act impiously and be weakened thereby. And yet “others” say that Aristogeiton was not misleading his interrogators, but instead fingered those who were actually part of the plot (18.5). Ps.-Aristotle does not, on this occasion, explicitly inform his reader of his own opinion on the controversy. But he concludes the tale of Aristogeiton by relating (as uncontested history) how the assassin fooled Hippias into taking his right hand as a pledge, and then reviled the tyrant for accepting the hand of his brother’s killer. Hippias, enraged, struck down Aristogeiton with a dagger, ending the interrogation—just as Aristogeiton had planned (18.6). This depiction of Aristogeiton as capable of seizing control of the situation by fooling his tormentors, bringing pollution upon them, and causing them to kill prematurely a man who might be of use to them, strongly disposes the reader to prefer the account of the *dēmotikoi*.¹³

It is notable that Ps.-Aristotle alludes to debates between *dēmotikoi* and their opponents specifically in the context of Solon and the Tyrannicides—as we have seen (2.A.1, 5.B.3), Solon’s constitutional arrangements of 594 B.C. and the background to the tyrannicide of 514 B.C. were much debated within the critical community; “corrections” of popular “errors” regarding the intentions of Solon and the Tyrannicides were clearly prominent among critical topoi. Ps.-Aristotle gives the reader to understand what Thucydides and Isocrates (for example) had hinted at only obliquely: that democratic partisans understood

¹³ Cf. Rhodes, *Commentary*, 233 (ad loc.): “The melodramatic end to the story accords with the version of the *dēmotikoi*, in which even under torture Aristogeiton maintained his opposition to the tyranny.”

what was at stake and were active participants in a struggle to assign specific political meanings to these stories. In each case, Ps.-Aristotle highlights a seemingly peripheral incident to illuminate controversies over the motives and the moral stature of the individuals in question.

For the democrats (at least by the late fourth century), Solon was a selfless liberator of the demos, who fought against the entrenched privileges of oligarchs.¹⁴ Aristogeiton, whatever his actual motives for the slaying, clearly had been adopted by the democrats as a symbol of resistance to tyranny, resistance that included bold actions and the intelligent capacity to mislead his captors into harming their own cause. The unnamed critical “others” –whose only motive in Ps.-Aristotle’s account is to “slander” –claim that both Solon and Aristogeiton were selfishly willing to sacrifice common interests to a short-term personal advantage.¹⁵ Arguments regarding the naturalness of acting in one’s own short-term interests—whether expressed by Thucydides’ Cleon and Diotodus, or by Plato’s Callicles and Thrasymachus—lie behind the reasoning of these unnamed opponents of “the democrats.” And much was at stake. The critical tradition had long been committed to the ideas that democracy was the self-interested rule of a sociological faction and that, as a result, democratic Athens existed in a constant and inevitable state of low-grade civil war between mass and elite. Aristotle of the *Politics* canonized this general critical notion by claiming that a society dominated only by selfish personal or class interest could not be regarded as a *politeia* of any sort. Ps.-Aristotle, by siding with the *dēmotikoi* on the stories of Solon and Aristogeiton, casts his vote with those philo-democratic voices (e.g., Pericles of the Funeral Oration) that claimed for Athenian democracy a genuine capacity for sustaining a high level of nonselfish concern for communal goods—both at the level of individual actions and at the level of the demos itself.¹⁶ Ps.-Aristotle’s moderately prodemocratic stance seems to confirm that the critical project, set on a different footing by Aristotle’s *Politics*, really had turned a corner.

A.3. *The Duty of the Good Citizen*

Ps.-Aristotle’s treatment of the controversial figure of Theramenes may provide a key to understanding the author’s self-appointed role as both political critic

¹⁴ Mossé, “Comment s’élabore”; Hansen, “Solonian Democracy.”

¹⁵ Both incidents may seem, to an American living in the late twentieth century—with the question of who did and who did not “name names” in the vile McCarthyite House Un-American Activities Committee hearings still very much alive, and accusations of petty peculation by high government officials flying thick and fast—all-too-familiar as weapons of partisan political discourse. See Schrecker, *Age of McCarthyism*.

¹⁶ On the imagination of civil strife in Athenian culture, see Loraux, “Reflections.” The fourth-century “demotic” position, as revealed in, e.g., Demosthenes 21, recognized an ongoing conflict between the ambitions of the elite and the dignity of the ordinary citizens, and emphasized the necessity of restraining the pleonectic tendencies of the former if the latter were to be maintained. But this tension was not imagined in terms of civil strife—rather, elite overreaching was seen as an aberration from the norm of a community of citizens acting through democratic institutions to preserve common goods.

and arbitrator between seemingly incompatible political positions. Theramenes was a prominent late-fifth-century Athenian politician who participated initially in the oligarchic regime of the Four Hundred and again in that of the Thirty, but in both cases balked at the onset of the worst abuses of power. The career of Theramenes had become a touchstone for the critical community well before the 330s B.C.—a writer's position on Theramenes was a pretty good indicator of the depth of his revulsion for democracy. Hard-line oligarchs in the tradition of Critias (who engineered the execution of Theramenes and who is pointedly never named in *Athēnaion politeia*) despised Theramenes as a traitor to the cause. But Ps.-Aristotle allies himself to the much more sympathetic tradition, represented by both Isocrates and Xenophon, that locates Theramenes between two “extreme” camps.¹⁷ Ps.-Aristotle (34.3) claims that Theramenes was the leader of those who, in 405/4 B.C. (at the very end of the Peloponnesian War), were not partisans of either democracy or oligarchy, who belonged to no organized political club (*hetairia*), but who sought a genuine middle road between demos and *gnōrimoi* under the banner of a restored “ancestral constitution.” In Ps.-Aristotle's account, the “Theramenean” *patrios politeia* is imagined as a genuine third option between oligarchy and democracy and thus strongly recalls Aristotle's largely hypothetical regime of “polity.” According to the *Athēnaion politeia*, the moderate position collapsed when the Spartans under Lysander chose to support the oligarchs.

In an earlier passage, Ps.-Aristotle anoints Theramenes as a model citizen and rebukes the critics of this putative defender of moderation.¹⁸ Having just castigated the current crop of demagogues, Ps.-Aristotle claims that the best of the more recent Athenian politicians were Thucydides (son of Melesias), Nicias, and Theramenes.

As far as Nicias and Thucydides are concerned, almost everyone agrees (*pantes schedon homologousin*) that they were not only gentlemen (*kaloi k'agathoi*) but also politicians who worked in a paternal manner (*patrikōs*) for the good of the entire polis, but regarding Theramenes there is a division of opinion (*amphisbētēsis tēs kriseōs*), because in his time there was much constitutional upheaval. But it seems to those who are not superficial critics (*tois mē parergōs apophainomenois*) that, contrary to his detractors, he did not seek the revolutionary overthrow (*kataluein*) of all *politeiai*, but rather that he supported them all so long as they did nothing against the laws, and he was able to engage in politics (*politeuesthai*) in all of them—as is the duty of the good citizen (*hoper estin agathou politou ergon*). But when they acted against the law, he did not acquiesce, but incurred their enmity. (28.5)

In this brief passage, the conjoined history of democracy and its critics seems to achieve some degree of closure, and a rather simple path around Ps.-Xenophon's

¹⁷ Ps.-Aristotle's treatment of Theramenes and the ancient debate about him: Rhodes, *Commentary*, 367–68, 413–14; and esp. Keaney, *Composition*, 133–52, with literature cited. Notably, according to the (albeit questionable) ancient biographical tradition, Theramenes was the teacher of Isocrates: *ibid.*, 19 with n. 112; above, 5.n.7.

¹⁸ Cf. Keaney, *Composition*, 147: *Ath. pol.* represents Theramenes as “a model of moral activity in a political context.”

aporia is laid out. First, instead of fierce competition at all points, harmony is asserted: “almost everyone” agrees on the personal excellence and paternalistic public spirit of the two politicians who were, respectively, Pericles’ and Alcibiades’ main political opponents.¹⁹ Ps.-Aristotle’s previous discussions of the opinions of the *dēmotikoi* on controversial matters to do with Solon and the Tyrannicides, along with his overt and implicit agreement with them, seemingly includes democratic sensibilities among this (albeit rather implausible) unity of interpretation.

Here, Plato’s scathing remarks regarding the failure of earlier Athenian politicians to “tame” the demos are for gotten (or intentionally elided), as is the historian Thucydides’ complex treatment of Nicias. Both Nicias and the son of Melesias are said to have engaged in politics in a “paternal” manner, although they were active politically in an era during which, as Ps.-Aristotle has recently asserted, the Athenians “did not stick to the laws as well as before” (26.2); when “*hoi polloi* increasingly brought the entire *politeia* under their own control” (27.1) and “the demos . . . chose to administer the *politeia* itself” (27.2). If there is a contradiction here, it does not detain our author; his unfavorable view of the mid-fifth-century democracy and favorable view of conservative politicians of the era is the compatible inversion of his favorable view of the late-fourth-century democracy and castigation of its current champions. In Ps.-Aristotle’s account, the moral stature of political leaders and the mode of government can be equated or divorced more or less at will, and so everyone, mass and elite alike, may have his cake and eat it, too.

There is, however, he informs us, some controversy about the status of Theramenes. But, he goes on to say, those willing to do their critical homework will be able to grasp that Theramenes is, after all, not an anarchistic revolutionary who sought the dissolution of all regimes, but a model polis citizen: he never sought revolution, but rather was able to accommodate himself to active participation in a variety of law-abiding regime types. This nonjudgmental capacity to work for the good of any constitutional regime is presented by Ps.-Aristotle as definitive of the “good citizen.” It is, therefore, presumptively the political attitude embraced by the author and encouraged in his reader.²⁰ And so, from the perspective established by this Aristotelian *Athēnaiōn politeia*, Ps.-Xenophon had been barking up the wrong tree. The question was not, after all, whether it might be possible to overthrow democracy by revolutionary means. Rather, the good citizen could and should be an active participant in any regime that might pertain—including democracy—provided it is administered in a lawful manner.

¹⁹ Nicias: above, 2.E; Thucydides the son of Melesias: Wade-Gery, “Thucydides,” with full discussion of sources; Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty*, 185–88.

²⁰ Keaney (*Composition*, 147–48) suggests that the author of *Ath. pol.* loosely modeled his portrait of Theramenes on the Socrates of Plato’s *Apology* and on Solon; like Solon, Theramenes was the right sort of people’s champion. There is also an echo (deliberate or otherwise) of Isocrates’ Timotheus (above, 5.B.4): *Ath. pol.*’s Theramenes engages in politics (*politeuesthai*) like a *politēs agathos* (28.5). Isocrates’ Timotheus is a *politēs agathos* who engages in politics with you all (*meth’ humōn politeuomenos*, 15.106, 115).

Participation by elites in the democracy had been regarded by Ps.-Xenophon as class treason, evidence of criminal intent, and explicable only in terms of a self-interested desire to do wrong without being detected. His successors in the critical project, Thucydides, Plato, and Isocrates, had agonized over the question of how would-be leaders in a democracy could remain uncorrupted by its culture and rhetorical processes, and they had detailed the dire consequences attendant upon the failure to avoid corruption on the part of elites who did participate in politics. For Ps.-Aristotle, by contrast, political participation in the current lawful regime is simply the mark of good citizenship.

Since, in contemporary (late-fourth-century) Athens, the democratic regime that had been reestablished in 403 seemed to demonstrate an admirable degree of legality (especially in respect to property), there was no compelling reason for someone who follows Ps.-Aristotle's way of thinking to seek revolutionary changes or to withdraw into hostile quietism. This nondogmatic approach to political activity was, as events soon proved, eminently practical. Were Ps.-Aristotle's elite reader of ca. 331–322 B.C. convinced to take the chameleonlike Theramenes depicted by *Athēnaiōn politeia* 28.5 as his model, he would be well prepared for the politics of the near future. This meant, in practice, adapting to a series of oligarchic regimes and democratic restorations that (as it happened) followed periodic Athenian military failures and patriotic uprisings in the years 322 B.C. and following. Ps.-Aristotle's ideal reader will not feel any compelling need to work for the implementation or overthrow of any of those regimes. He is neither a “polypragmatic” political activist, nor a disgruntled quietist; but he performs the duties of the citizen along with his fellows as long as the regime can claim constitutional legitimacy by maintaining forms of legality.²¹

Meanwhile, at the time Ps.-Aristotle was writing, the democracy seemed stable enough. The ultimate authority of the ordinary people is frankly acknowledged, but, contrary to his many predecessors in the critical tradition, Ps.-Aristotle does not encourage his reader to regard this state of affairs as particularly burdensome. The problem of “how to criticize Athenian democracy” has, it seems, simply dissolved into the much simpler project of narrating the historical development of democracy and describing Athens' current governmental and legal arrangements. In so doing, Ps.-Aristotle may actually have helped his elite reader deal with an unknown future—may have provided him, in short, with the capacity Thucydides had implied was a benefit accruing uniquely to those who engaged in the protracted struggle necessary to master a vastly longer, more austere, and more complicated historical text.

²¹ He might, however, find political leadership more trying; both staunchly democratic politicians (like Demosthenes: Plut., *Dem.*, 29) and those willing to countenance some forms of oligarchy (like Phocion, the only Athenian other than Socrates known to have been executed by hemlock after conviction by the people's court: Plut., *Phoc.*, 36), lost their lives in the to-and-fro of Athenian constitutional and foreign-policy upheavals in the last quarter of the fourth century. Mitchell (“Lykourgan Athens”) argues convincingly that there was no organized “pro-Macedonian/anti-democratic” faction in Athenian politics in the era 338–322 B.C.

B. THEOPHRASTUS' "OLIGARCHIC MAN" AND THE PARADOX
OF INTELLECTUALISM

To what extent can Ps.-Aristotle be regarded as typical of the critical sensibility of the decades preceding the Lamian War of 322? Isocrates' last major speech and political testament, the *Panathenaicus* of 339, offers an interesting counterpoint. Here, contrary to Aristotle, Isocrates explicitly denies the validity of treating "aristocracy" as a distinct analytic category, contending in a very traditional vein that there are in fact only three regimes: monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy. Each of these regimes, he says, is excellent to the extent that it employs the leadership of excellent men (12.131–32). The ancestral Athenians were well led under the monarchy of Theseus and the subsequent (ancestral) democracy; the latter is the paternalistic regime already familiar from the *Areopagiticus*. In the *Panathenaicus*, it is, however, Sparta—long regarded as a model of aristocratic virtue by Athenian oligarchs and oligarchic sympathizers, although castigated by Aristotle in the *Politics*—rather than the current Athenian democracy that bears the brunt of Isocrates' invective and provides the primary foil for ancestral Athenian excellence. Yet later in the speech, in a dialogue between Isocrates and his students, the possibility is raised that Isocrates, who previously "had praised the government of Sparta more than any other man," may have intended his overt censure to be read as cryptic praise of the Lacedaemonians (239–41). Isocrates' pro-Spartan interlocutor, moreover, undermines Isocrates' prior claim that the rule of excellent men will lead simply to the best policy in any regime:

I know that when your polis [sc. Athens] is deliberating about the greatest affairs, those reputed to be the wisest (*oî men arista phronein dokountes*) sometimes fail to grasp the expedient course, whereas some chance person, from among those who are believed to be inferior (*tôn de phaulôn*) and who are looked down upon, hits on the right course and is deemed to speak most rightly (*beltista legein edoxen*). (12.248)

Genuine Athenian democrats would certainly concur. The *Panathenaicus*, then, allows (at least) two readings, while refusing (12.265) to endorse any one of them: either (as Isocrates initially claims) ancestral Athens is simply best, or, as his interlocutor hints, there is an underlying compatibility between the political traditions of democratic Athens and aristocratic Sparta. In either case, the sharp distinction between the splendor of the Athenian past and the corrupt present, and thus much of the force of Isocrates' political criticism, is lost in the thicket of "double arguments" (*logoi amphiboloi*, 12.240) that serve to obscure the author's own intentions and politics. Isocrates' attack on "aristocracy" as a distinct category and his deliberate refusal to allow an uncontested reading of his own text may seem to invert the goals of political documents produced in the Lyceum. And yet the *Panathenaicus* (especially 12.119–48) shares Ps.-Aristotle's philo-Athenianism and his fascination with Athenian constitutional

antiquities. In both texts, overt criticism of the prevailing democracy remains, but in both it must take second place to the more pressing concern of how to arbitrate—or obscure—seemingly incompatible political commitments.²²

Voices openly hostile to democracy no doubt continued to be heard in private Athenian circles; one of Ps.-Aristotle's fellows at the Lyceum offers some notion of what they might have sounded like. In about 319 B.C., Theophrastus, Aristotle's student (and designated successor as leader of the Lyceum), wrote the *Characters*, a striking (and generically innovative) collection of personality sketches; among these is the "Oligarchic Man." Although a native of Lesbos, Theophrastus was resident in Athens for most of the period from 334 B.C. until his death around 285. The setting of his sketch of the Oligarchic Man is very specifically democratic Athens of the late fourth century—possibly the restored democracy of 318/7, but more likely the democracy as it pertained in the decades before 322.²³

Theophrastus' Oligarchic Man is a somewhat absurd figure who goes about in public dressed ostentatiously and speaks out against sycophants, bribe-taking in the *dikastēria*, and the entire "race of demagogues" (26.4–6). He calls for plenary powers for elected government officials and prefers single magistrates to boards: When the demos is debating in Assembly over who should be chosen to help the archon in preparations for the procession, he comes forward (i.e., to the *bema*) and declares that the helpers should be given absolute authority (as *autokratores*). If others propose appointing ten helpers, he says that one is adequate (*hikanos*)—but it must be a "real man" (*anēr*, 26.2). Indeed, the Oligarchic Man's true political preference is monarchy; he claims Theseus erred in abolishing kingship at Athens (26.6). He seeks to display his education by citing Homer, but actually knows only the verse praising unitary kingship (*Il.* 2.204, cf. Aristotle *Pol.* 1292a13). He calls for the elite to meet in private in order to discuss political matters and asserts that they should give up public participation in politics so as to avoid being either insulted or honored by the democracy. He claims that he cannot grasp why good men should take any part in communal affairs in the democratic polis—either "we" or "they" must rule, and that's all there is to it (26.3). He disparages the ordinary people both as ingrates and as slaves to gifts and bribes. He feels himself shamed when "some scrawny unwashed type" sits next to him in the Assembly (26.5). To cap it all, according to the epilogue, he says these things to foreigners and to those who share his own character and political opinions (26.6).²⁴

Much of this is quite familiar as a pastiche of various critical perspectives developed by earlier and more overtly serious texts. The Oligarchic Man's com-

²² Too, *Rhetoric of Identity*, 68–72, offers an insightful analysis of the speech's complexities.

²³ Greek text, with translation, introduction, and notes: Rusten, "Theophrastus, *Characters*." Setting and date: *ibid.*, 8–11; Stein, *Definition und Schilderung*, esp. 40–43.

²⁴ This last sentence summarizes the "epilogue" to *Characters* 26; it is often regarded as a much later interpolation to Theophrastus' text (Rusten, "Theophrastus, *Characters*," 8, 147 n. c.). But it is certainly in keeping with the general portrait—the only new information it provides is that the Oligarchic Man expresses his complaints to "*xenoi*."

plaints about courts and liturgies recall Ps.-Xenophon and Aristophanes. The call for a “real man” as *autokratōr*, one who will be “adequate” to the task at hand, sounds like an echo of Plato’s Callicles in the *Gorgias*. We may imagine Theophrastus’ Oligarchic Man as one of the gentlemen Isocrates alludes to as sitting about in the workshops, complaining about the current political situation to like-minded souls (above, 5.A). And, in common with Isocrates’ anonymous malcontents, the Oligarchic Man is mostly bark without bite. He is (at least in the view of the epilogue) a vaguely unpatriotic figure. Like Plato’s Socrates, his interlocutors include foreigners, but unlike the Socrates of the *Apology*, he seems to have no deep commitment to the betterment of Athenians. Yet there is a contradiction between the Oligarchic Man’s speech and public action: he maintains to his associates that the elite should discuss matters in private and avoid participation in democratic politics, but he himself attends the citizen Assembly and addresses the demos on public policy—despite his expressed distaste for demagogues and the close proximity of ordinary citizens. This disjunction between speech and action may, ironically, bring the Oligarchic Man into the ambit of Ps.-Aristotle’s Theramenean “good citizen.” The Oligarchic Man thinks subversive thoughts. He whines bitterly to his friends, and he may irritate some people by his style of dress.²⁵ But speaking ill of Assembly speakers and reviling sycophants as a class would hardly mark him as a revolutionary figure in fourth-century Athens; the despised demotic citizen he reluctantly accepts as a seatmate in the Assembly might well second his opinions on these topics. In practice, the Oligarchic Man has adapted himself to the democratic regime as it is; he is evidently quite capable of “engaging in politics” in the democratic polity despite his moral, political, and aesthetic reservations.

Given Isocrates’ studied ambivalence in *Panathenaicus* and the imagined behavior of Theophrastus’ Oligarchic Man, perhaps it is not too much to suppose that an anonymous student at the Lyceum, one who fulfilled, more or less skillfully, an assignment to write up an *Athēnaiōn politeia*, might be an accurate barometer of late-fourth-century intellectual trends. What would an acceptance of this hypothesis entail for our understanding of the “critical project” as a whole? Taking Ps.-Aristotle’s seemingly easy relationship with the democracy of his own time as typical of the elite intellectual community of the late fourth century would seem to point to at least one of two possible conclusions: either Athenian political critics had, over time, lost some of their hostility to popular rule and learned to adapt themselves to the democracy, or the democracy had responded constructively to its critics and so was less objectionable to an elite intellectual sensibility. The first possibility appears likely enough, in light of the arguments developed in earlier chapters: Thucydides’ large-scale attempt to demonstrate the impossibility of long-term flourishing of a democratic “government by speech acts” had foundered on the observed realia of the democratic restoration. The critical project subsequently reached an apogee of sorts, in

²⁵ Dress style as a political statement: Ober, *Mass*, 206–7.

terms of both passion and intellectual aspiration, with the early and middle dialogues of Plato. But the metaphysical ontology of Plato's *Republic* left the reader without a genuine politics to embrace, and this presented a serious problem. Intellectualism, no matter how passionate, could never quite manage to overcome the deeply ingrained Greek desire (whether that desire was cultural or, with Aristotle, natural) to experience the life of the engaged participant in the real world of a working political community.

Athenian political critics inhabited a society that valorized political activity. It can hardly be accidental that Thucydides, Plato's Socrates (of the *Apology*), Plato (of the *Seventh Letter*), and Isocrates each offered a fairly detailed explanation of why he was unable to participate throughout his adult life as a leader in the political affairs of Athens.²⁶ Plato's tendency to retreat into utopian fantasy and "care of the soul" was never complete, even in the *Republic*; it gave way late in his life to the less-rejectionist position on democracy adopted in the *Statesman* and to the ostensibly more realistic (if hyperlegalistic) "second-best" polis of the *Laws*. Plato's late political writing was followed by Aristotle's attempt to develop a workable "democratic aristocracy" in book 7 of the *Politics*. None of these projects, however, was ultimately capable of giving the elite Athenian citizen who recognized himself as a "political animal" a viable real-world alternative to participation, on the demos' terms, in the imperfect but workable community of the democratic polis. By the third quarter of the fourth century, the rise of imperial Macedon encouraged critical theorists to view the democratic polis in an expanded geopolitical context. But Philip, as hegemon of the Corinthian League, proved hostile to constitutional revolutions; Alexander's actual colonies were for veterans and traders, not philosophers. Meanwhile, voices of immanent criticism (e.g., Aristophanes, Isocrates of the *Antidosis*, Timotheus *logos*, and Aristotle of the middle books of the *Politics*) had kept alive the possibility of integrating a critical attitude with participation in democratic politics.²⁷

If we regard "epic" philosophical criticism of democracy (especially Plato of the *Republic*) as Walzerian rejectionism and the conjoined history of Greek political philosophy and Athenian democracy as a story about zero-sum competition, then Ps.-Aristotle's text might lead us to conclude that in one sense democratic politics, to invert Benjamin Barber's formulation, successfully "conquered" philosophy in its own time.²⁸ If, in Athens, democracy fell victim to the

²⁶ Contrast Too (*Rhetoric of Identity*), who argues that Isocrates' discussions of his "small voice" and lack of active political engagement are not apologetic, but constitute a bold claim to discursive authority.

²⁷ Here, as elsewhere, Xenophon might provide a prodrome: harshly critical to democracy in some moods, he suggests (e.g., in the *Cavalry Commander* and the *Poroi*) the possibility of constructive engagement in the democratic regime by the patriotic aristocrat and offers apparently serious proposals for nonrevolutionary amelioration.

²⁸ The title of Barber, *The Conquest of Politics*, refers to the putative attempt by modern political philosophers to "conquer" real-world participatory politics through overt or covert foundationalist

military efficiency of the Macedonians, democracy as a political culture and an institutional structure flourished in the Hellenistic Greek poleis well into the era of Roman rule. But the *agōn* between democracy and political philosophy did not end even with the historical demise of Greek democracy. Texts written by the Athenian critics of popular rule, and preserved by Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Renaissance intellectuals, helped to establish the negative image of Greek democracy for most political thinkers from the time of the late Roman Republic to the nineteenth century of our era. Some approaches to reading critical Athenian texts encourage the maintenance of a boundary between the historical study of political thought and prodemocratic political activism, even today. But it is worth reminding ourselves that no detailed account of Athenian popular rule could have survived the massive cultural and political dislocations of late antiquity and the Middle Ages, except in literary texts with a potentially universalizable form and content. Even if (counterfactually) the Athenian critics of democracy had been uniformly rejectionist and had contributed nothing of positive value to Greek democracy in its own day, it would still be the case that it was their texts that kept alive the memory of a very real era, both glorious and terrifying, when the ordinary people of a great state were masters of their own fate and ruled themselves by open debate and democratic ballot. That memory helped to inspire the practical and intellectual political work of George Grote and his fellow British liberals in the mid-nineteenth century, and it has remained a resource for those seeking to challenge the inevitability of submission to new varieties of tyranny and oligarchy.²⁹

If we shift metaphors, abandon the useful fiction of conceiving the relationship between Greek democracy and political philosophy as a zero-sum game, and accept that the Western tradition of political thought began as a fruitful dialogue with democracy (albeit a dialogue often best characterized by the strong language of contest, struggle, and battle), we may be better prepared to explain the remarkable flowering of modern liberal-democratic theory and practice. The story I have tried to tell here of the early development of Western political thought is not, however, meant as a teleological account of a democratic acorn and a political-theoretical oak. Rather, my point is that the literary memory of Athenian democracy, as preserved in dissident texts, was an early and important addition to our permanent stock of cultural resources. The dialogue between Greek political thought and the democracy it contested provided concepts and a rich political terminology that proved useful when (at various moments from the fifteenth century to the present, and in various places around the globe) the reappearance of “freedom qua not being under another,” as a

projects. Cf. Arendt (*Between Past and Future*, 8), suggesting that Plato would have told French existentialists that their inability “to apply [their] own rules to the realm of political affairs” was a “fundamental failure of political philosophy” almost as old as the history of Western philosophy and metaphysics.

²⁹ Hellenistic democracy: above, 1.n.3. Roberts, *Athens on Trial*, surveys the long history of postclassical responses to Athenian democracy and the rhetorical and philosophical uses to which the Athenian example was put in Western political writing.

realistically generalizable human condition, once again focused the attention of political writers and activists on the nexus of relationships between power and justice, individual and community, deliberation and enactment, class conflict and public interests, eros and education.³⁰

C. THE POWER OF IDEAS? TOWARD A CRITICAL DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSE

The conflict between Greek political thought and democracy is, of course, only part of the story. Suzanne Marchand has recently framed the age-old problem of the intellectual historian in an evocative sentence: “Establishing the process by which ideas become active forces, and conversely how events or structural factors effect changes in thought, has ever been the intellectual historian’s nightmare, one from which I’m afraid we shall never fully awaken.”³¹ Much of this book has been an attempt to address the second part of Marchand’s dilemma: to trace the effect of “structural factors” on the ideas developed by Athenian intellectuals. The other half of the story, the effect of the “critical project” on the historical Athenian democracy, remains to be told. This is not the place to try to tell that story in anything approaching persuasive detail, but we may hazard a rough sketch, pending (with the Socrates of the *Gorgias*) a more careful consideration of these matters at some other time.³²

First and most obviously: The literary broadsides offered by the Athenian critics of popular rule never led to a revolutionary threat to the democratic regime. There was no attempt to overthrow the democracy between the restoration of 403 and the imposition of a moderate oligarchy by the conquering Macedonians, following Athens’ loss of the Lamian War in 322. So, in seeking the influence of dissident ideas on Athenian politics, we must look for internal developments in democracy, as a constitution or as a political culture, that might be said to be responses to critical arguments. And, of course, we must offer some plausible scenario for *how* the ideas in question were translated from critical *logos* to democratic *ergon*. Attempting to establish the *direct* influence of a particular critical perspective on specific enactments of the Assembly is probably chimerical. Tracing the influence of critical ideas on programs of individual Athenian politicians (e.g., the impact of Plato’s political philosophy on public projects sponsored by Lycurgus, a prominent statesman of the 330s and

³⁰ Dahl (*Democracy*, 24–25) notes that the republican tradition of thought “traces its origins less to the democratic ideas and practices of classical Greece . . . than to the most notable critic of Greek democracy: Aristotle.” And yet, “although the republican tradition diverged from Greek democratic thought, and in some respects was antithetical to it, republicanism nevertheless shared several of its assumptions.” The dialogical model proposed here helps to explain the apparent conundrum.

³¹ Marchand, *Down from Olympus*, xxii.

³² This book and Ober, *Mass*, are installments in what I hope will eventually be a trilogy on political discourse in democratic Athens; the projected third volume is intended as a study of (inter alia) dicanic rhetoric as political theory.

reportedly a sometime student at the Academy) might repay further work, but has not been my concern here.³³

More to the present point (if further from the goal of establishing *direct* links between ideas and events) is the striking set of correlations between what I have designated “critical political literature” and some of the preserved speeches of Athenian orators. We cannot know what a genuine Assembly speech by Themistocles, or Pericles, or Cleon would have sounded like, but the mid-fourth-century Assembly speeches preserved in the Demosthenic corpus strike a forthrightly critical stance.³⁴ Moreover, speeches prepared for delivery in the people’s courts may offer an even more fertile field, in that they sometimes appear to respond to charges leveled by critical writers against democracy, and in an idiom more thoughtfully dialectical than partisan. I have employed Demosthenes’ speech 21 (*Against Meidias*) as a foil for critical arguments at several points in previous chapters; Demosthenes’ recapitulation of some key themes from Plato’s *Gorgias* is particularly noteworthy. Lycurgus’ speech 1 (*Against Leocrates*)—which centers on the responsibility of the individual citizen to his polis and the impropriety of abandoning the polis that nurtured him—rehearses themes familiar from Plato’s *Crito*.³⁵ Examples of rhetorical texts that can plausibly be read as engaging in a dialogue (at whatever remove) with critical texts could, I think, be multiplied without much difficulty.

The apparently more-than-casual correlation between the concerns of certain critical texts and certain Athenian public orations can be explained at least in part in the terms I have emphasized in the previous chapters: as evidence for deep critical awareness of democratic political discourse. But surely it is oversimplistic to suppose that the relationship between public rhetoric and criticism was unidirectional. It seems preferable to include some Athenian rhetors in the imagined conversation among democracy’s intellectual critics with which this book began (Introduction, 1.C).³⁶ There is no a priori reason to exclude prominent democratic politicians from that conversation; the rhetors were, for the

³³ Lycurgus and the possible influence of the Academy: Humphreys, “Lycurgus,” esp. 209–10, 214ff. Accepting some Platonic influence on Lycurgus does not entail the assumption that the orator was hostile to democracy; Engels (“Zur Stellung Lykurgs”) argues, in my view rightly, that Lycurgus’ programs were fully democratic. On the tradition of other Athenian statesman who were supposed by the ancient biographical tradition to have studied with Plato (Chabrias, Demosthenes, Hypereides, Phocion), see Brunt, “Plato’s Academy,” 300–301, with sources cited. Brunt (*ibid.*, esp. 332) categorically denies (contra, e.g., Field, *Plato and His Contemporaries*, 43–45) that ancient philosophers or philosophical schools had, or intended to have, any positive influence on practical politics.

³⁴ Ober, *Mass*, 321–22; Yunis, *Taming*, 257–68.

³⁵ Lycurgus’ Platonic language and conceptions of justice and punishment in *Against Leocrates* are discussed by Allen, “Situation of Punishment,” ch. 8. Zeller (*Philosophie der Griechen*, 2: 420) claims, by contrast, that there is no trace of Plato’s philosophy to be found in the speeches of orators assigned to him as students by the ancient biographical tradition (Demosthenes, Hypereides, Lycurgus).

³⁶ Demosthenes’ comment (20.105–8) to the effect that one may praise Sparta in Athens, but not Athens in Sparta, sounds very much like a riposte to the comment attributed to Socrates (Aristotle *Rh.* 136768–9) that it is not difficult to praise Athenians in Athens (cf. Plato *Menex.* 235d).

most part, men from the same social and educational backgrounds as the critics themselves. It is certainly not difficult to imagine rhetors and critics reading one another's work, attending the same symposia, belonging to the same civic and religious associations, meeting casually or by arrangement at those shops and gymnasia where political conversation was the order of the day.³⁷

As soon as the question is posed, it becomes apparent that there is actually no very tidy way to isolate "critics of democracy" and "democratic politicians" as discrete categories: Thucydides was sufficiently active in Athenian politics to be elected general by the Assembly; if we are to take seriously his claim that he began his history at the outbreak of the war, he was at work on his critical text while an Athenian general. Plato of the *Seventh Letter* regards philosophy as an alternative to the career as democratic politician he might have had. Isocrates suggests that he would have addressed the Assembly but for his lack of nerve and weak voice. If we assume that rhetors and critics conversed (especially through writing and reading texts) and that these conversations had some impact upon subsequent public speeches by rhetors (as well as on critical literature), it becomes very likely that the ordinary Athenians who attended the Assembly or sat as jurors heard and responded to echoes of those conversations. If this is the case, then to the (very considerable) extent that public speeches affected decision-making in Athens, the critical project had at least an indirect impact on actual political decisions in Athens and thereby materially affected the course of democratic development.³⁸ In this sense, Thucydides participated in politics after his exile, Plato had a political career after all, Isocrates was heard in the Assembly, and even the metic Aristotle found a voice in the public fora of the democratic city.

Are there observable phenomena that would lend credence to this hypothetical scenario—that might independently lead us to posit the influence of democracy's critics on democratic political culture or institutions? Perhaps. Though I would vigorously reject the depiction of fourth-century Athenian democracy as "exhausted" or even "mellowed" in terms of its fundamental commitments and values, it is certainly the case that in the decades after the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians engaged in a good deal of institutional experimentation.³⁹ If it is

³⁷ Social standing of Athenian rhetors: Ober, *Mass*, 112–18. Trevett ("Aristotle's Knowledge") argues that in writing the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle did not actually cite (but probably did know) written versions of symbouleutic/dicanic speeches by Athenian orators; cf. above, 6.n.82.

³⁸ Cf. Yunis, *Taming*, 35, 277: (in reference to Demosthenes 18): "Not only had the ideas and precepts of theoreticians like Thucydides and Plato filtered down over the years into the popular discourses of a practicing politician, but Demosthenes presented them so expertly that on that day, at least, they exerted real influence on the common citizenry."

³⁹ Humphreys (*Family*, xvii–xviii) argues that fourth-century Athens was pervaded by "nostalgia" for the unity and order of the fifth century, and that this nostalgia accounts for the public "re-masculinization" projects (e.g., L. yeurgus' building program and cultural reforms of the 330s). Rhodes ("Athenian Democracy") offers a concise review of institutional changes in the fourth century, but his notions (322–23) that open discussion by philosophers of democracy's flaws is a sign that the Athenian "enthusiasm" for democracy was gone, and that fourth-century Athenians were willing to do no more than "work the machine" of democratic politics, seem to me simply wrong

difficult to link a specific critical idea with a specific institutional innovation, the general fourth-century Athenian tendency to innovate in ways that point to a concern with collective self-control (toward “Socratic” *enkrateia*) rather than collective self-augmentation (away from “Calliclean” *pleonexia*) may reflect an increased willingness on the part of the political community to engage in self-examination and to act on the basis of an ongoing process of deliberative self-criticism. At the same time, fourth-century Athens was characterized by a plurality of moral values. While the democratic Athenians remained staunchly loyal to their core values of freedom conjoined with political equality and security, the dissidents’ fear that democratic freedom would drive out other traditional values proved unfounded. As the rhetorical corpus amply demonstrates, fourth-century Athenians remained deeply attached to ideals of piety, courage, and justice conjoined with lenient generosity, as well as to a host of other virtues familiar from earlier Greek literature. While these values, along with the terminology of aristocratic excellence, were indeed integrated into a forthrightly democratic ideology, their vibrancy helped to shape the diverse and complex social identity that Plato referred to as “the democratic soul.”

The dramatic historical events of 431–403 may, in and of themselves, account for much of Athens’ postwar reflectiveness, and a variety of cultural factors will have contributed to the durable diversity of Athenian values.⁴⁰ But historical events and culture itself are experienced at least in part through those explanatory narratives which succeed in gaining a wide social currency. Insofar as Athens remained a city of words, a city where speech not only had meaning, but acted performatively to establish new meanings and new social facts, fourth-century demotic sensibilities and the decisions of the fourth-century demos are unlikely to have been completely independent of the critical project described in these pages. The literature of dissent might well be numbered among the “sources of the democratic Athenian self.”

What are the consequences of adopting this line of argument? It does not, I believe, commit us to the notion that Athenian democracy had no voice of its own or that democratic ideology was an empty shell that gained its form and substance from values and commitments developed in elite intellectual circles.⁴¹ No idea inherently repugnant to the demos—which meant in practice no idea that seemed to threaten the political authority of the demos or the dignity of the democratic citizen—could gain a sympathetic hearing in the Athenian Assembly or people’s court. As Ps.-Aristotle asserted unequivocally, in Athens the demos was master. But the practice of demotic mastery was arguably tempered by the demos’ internalization of a self-critical perspective. And among the sources of that perspective was the intellectual project I have attempted to delineate here. If this is correct, it suggests that the tendency of democratic ideol-

(Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 29–31). Hansen, *Athenian Democracy*, covers the same institutional ground in greater detail without the sense of decline preceeding fall.

⁴⁰ As I argued, with specific reference to defense policy, in Ober, *Fortress Attica*.

⁴¹ See Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 26–29.

ogy to devolve into an oppressive form of cultural hegemony, a recurrent theme in Athenian critical writing, was in practice counterbalanced by the reiterated public airing and instantiation of critical arguments—just as critical thought itself was constantly challenged by democratic expression and by the practical success and stability of fourth-century democracy. I suggested above that this ongoing dialogue between critical-intellectual and democratic discourses eventuated in the Western tradition of political thought. Yet in its own time, it participated in maintaining at Athens a lively political culture that was “democratic” in a sense that exceeds (but does not supersede) the blunt fact of the “power of the people” to do what they wished.⁴²

The American pragmatic philosopher John Dewey, whose diverse and pervasive intellectual heritage has informed this book from its inception, attempted to delineate the philosophical implications of democracy. But Dewey also sought, in the words of Giles Gunn,

the reconception of philosophy as a critical model of cultural discourse instrumental to—indeed indispensable for—the actualization of democracy in the community. . . . Dewey conceived of democracy not only as the creature of a culture that was essentially critical, but also as in fact conducive to the creation of a special [and new] kind of critical culture.⁴³

I have tried to show in these pages that Athens in the late fifth and fourth centuries B.C. may provide a model—albeit a partial and imperfect and problematic one—of the close relationship between critical thinking and pragmatic democracy that Dewey regarded (and I with him) as an essential prerequisite for building the best practically imaginable *politeia*, the city truly worthy of our highest aspirations and our dedicated labors.

⁴² Depending on whether one focuses on the power of the people to effect policy or on the openness of informal debates and the procedures encouraging public discussion, Athens may seem to have functioned either as a “strong democracy” (in the sense that the term is used by Barber, *Strong Democracy*, esp. 111, 209–12) or as a “deliberative democracy” (of the sort preferred by Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*). Cf. the debate between Euben (“Reading Democracy”) and Barber (“Misreading Democracy”).

⁴³ Gunn, *Thinking*, 75 and 79. Cf. Dewey, *Political Writings*, 8 (in specific reference to both ancient and modern thinkers): “Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men.” Or, similarly, Gramsci *Prison Notebooks*: “Ideas are not born of ideas, philosophies of other philosophies; they are an ever-renewed expression of real historical developments” (cited in Femia, *Gramsci’s*, 100). Dewey’s conception of “critical thinking” is complex. It is certainly not limited to the specifically political definition I have employed here, but would, I believe, accommodate it without difficulty. Cf. Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, esp. 160–66, 203–8; West, *American Evasion*, 69–111; Westbrook, *John Dewey and Democracy*; Ryan, *John Dewey*.

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